

THE STORY OF

WHO KNOWS THE RAMAYANA KNOWS HIMSELF

ILLUSTRATIONS.

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THE STORY
OF
THE RAMAYANA
RETOLD IN A SIMPLE STRAIGHT MANNER

BY
A. MADHAVIAH

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
THE HON'BLE MR P S SIVASWAMI Aiyer, C.S.I., C.I.E.

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Right Hon'ble the Lord Pentland, P C , G C I E ,
Governor of Madras

INTRODUCTION, by the Hon'ble Mr P S.
Sivaswami Aiyer, C S I , C I E , Member of
(the Executive) Council, Madras

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD TO THE YOUNG
READER

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TO

HIS EXCELLENCY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE LORD PENTLAND, PC, GCIE,

GOVERNOR OF MADRAS

THIS STORY OF RAMA KING AND HERO OF INDIA

WHOSE ANCIENT REIGN OF PEACE AND JOY

WAS WHOLLY FOR THE GOOD AND BY THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR

WHO BELIEVES THAT PROVIDENCE HAS BROUGHT TOGETHER

THE EAST AND THE WEST ON THIS SACRED SOIL

FOR THE GOOD OF MANKIND

INTRODUCTION.

THERE is no book more widely read throughout the length and breadth of India than the *Ramayana*. Year in and year out, there is no book more often recited in the Hindu household. Children learn the story from their grandmothers at home and grown-up men and women gather round the Pouranik at night in villages and towns. The story appeals to all ages and all classes. It enthrals the imagination of the young and captivates the hearts of the old. It has moulded the lives of countless generations of Hindus. To this day the dying Hindu invokes the sacred name of Sri Rama with his parting breath as a means of salvation. The incidents in the life of Rama and Sita have furnished themes to poems and plays innumerable. The story has lost none of its fascination or inspiration and will bear to be re-told again and again.

The moral education of the young is a problem which has come to the front in this century and has been engaging the attention of the educational world and the public. Opinion is divided to some extent as to the possibility and advantage of direct moral instruction. A good story well told is of greater value especially to

the young than a dry statement or discussion of moral maxims. And ideals drawn from the national literature of a civilized people necessarily have a greater educative effect than those borrowed from foreign sources. No apology is therefore needed for this book which Mr Madhaviah has written for the benefit of the school-going youth of this country. He is no novice as an author. By his fine culture and his previous essays in the field of literature Mr Madhaviah is well equipped for the task he has undertaken. The book is written in a pleasant, flowing and attractive style specially suited to the young reader.

Whether the *Ramayana* was a mere creation of the poet's genius, or was intended as an allegorical representation of the spread of Aryan civilization into the South or was a poetic presentation of historical events is a point on which scholars will probably differ. The orthodox Hindu mind accepts the narrative as literally true. But the educated Hindu is more inclined to accept the last alternative and sees no reason why stripped of all the supernatural embellishments which the poet's fancy has made, the narrative should not be accepted as substantially true. It is in this light that Mr Madhaviah has tried to present the *Ramayana*. He has sought to produce not a mere

abridgement of the great epic, but a narrative of the incidents so far as they are likely to be acceptable to the rationalistic mind of the twentieth century. As the author does not profess to follow Valmiki strictly, the question whether the interests of rationalism have not involved some sacrifice of the poetic charms of Valmiki's epic need not detain us.

In the interpretation of the characters in the epic, Mr Madhaviah has his own view-point. Some of the incidents in the *Ramayana* have been classical topics of controversy. For instance the killing of Vali by Rama has been a perpetual puzzle to the reader. The case for and against the propriety of the slaying of Vali is argued with consummate fairness and skill by Valmiki and one feels at the end that the poet has left the advantage of the argument with Vali. Why the poet inserted an incident which strikes some at least as a spot in the sun-like character of Rama is a riddle. It may be said that this slight touch of imperfection which the brush of Valmiki has added only proves the poet's fidelity to human nature and makes Rama more kin to us and more loveable. But the explanation fails to satisfy. Critics may or may not agree with Mr Madhaviah in all his comments on the characters. Absolute agreement can hardly be expected. But they will agree

that he has succeeded in producing an eminently readable and delightful story which will serve to implant in youthful minds a love of the lofty ideals portrayed in the immortal epic.

P. S. SIVASWAMY Aiyer.

11-4-1914

FOREWORD.

YOU have no doubt heard of Rama and Sita. In this wide world, there is no Hindu home where they are not known, and hardly a Hindu family in which some do not bear their names. But they lived so long ago, they were so great and good, and then life with all its joys and griefs, its glory and suffering, has been told in deathless verse so beautifully and so well, that they are now thought of as divine beings and worshipped in our temples and homes. Our holy books say that there is something godlike in every one of us, man or woman. If that is so, men and women who excel in purity, goodness and greatness must have far more of the godlike in them than the rest of us. In this story, however, I do not mean to speak to you of Rama and Sita as divine beings. A Tamil verse says that it does one good even to see good people, to listen to them, to speak of their goodness, and to be in their company. It is thus that I wish to tell you the human story of the great Aryan prince and his wife,—how they

loved each other and all good people, how they strove to right the wrongs of others and help those in need, even when they were themselves in trouble and pain, how they walked in the straight path of duty and righteousness, seeking always to be pure, truthful, noble, merciful and helpful to their fellow-beings

This story, if only I tell it as it ought to be told, will help you live your life nobly, usefully and well, walking aright in the eyes of God and man. To-day, I know and I love Rama and Sita, Bharata and Lakshmana, Kausalya and Sumitra, Guha and Hanuman, and many another noble man and woman whose figures in the grand poem, better than when I first took up my pen to write their story some eighteen months ago, and if one reader says as much on reading these pages, my labour of love shall not have been in vain

THE STORY OF THE RAMAYANA.



I. The Land of the Kosalas.

I HOPE you love well this dear old land of ours I am sure you will love it still more when you come to know of its great past But in times gone by, it was not what it is now. In the good old days when Rama lived, aye, and walked through the whole length of it, there were no railways or high-roads, telegraph lines or post offices, printed books or newspapers, such as we now have There was not then one supreme rule over all the land, but scores of kings and petty princes, more or less free of each other and often at war, reigned each over a city and some part of the country around it We often hear of fifty-six kingdoms and kings in the tales of old, but very likely there were many more In Northern India, most of these kings were of the Aryan race and Kshattriyas by caste, south of the Vindhya Mountains, the people were either the natives of the soil, or Dravidians who had settled down in the land before the Aryans came into it These people were not as fair of skin as the Aryans, and* their civilisation was different

So the Aryans, as we shall see, looked down upon them and called them names. This, of course, was not right, but it has been the way of all conquerors from the earliest times. You should not however, think, that because they had not some of the conveniences and arts of life that we now have, either the Aryans in the North or the Dravidians in the South were a barbarous people. Our country was one of the most civilized in the world in those days, and the people were happy and contented under their kings. There were not, it is true, so many towns and cities then, nor was so much land tilled and sown. Vast tracts of the country were but jungle, the abode of wild beasts and of the rude, dark children of the soil. But many of the cities that were could boast of all the arts and luxuries of a high civilization, as you will learn when you read of Ayodhya where Rama was born, or of Mithila where Sita was born. These were Aryan cities in the North, but that the South was no less civilised can be known from what the poets tell us of Lanka. The story speaks of the times when the Aryans after having won dominion over the greater part of Northern India and in a way over the South also, again pushed their arms southwards to strengthen their hold on an alien people, and I wish you to keep this in mind.

When there were so many kings in the land, it was only natural that a few should now and then make themselves more powerful than the rest, and have some chieftains of the neighbouring country under them. Such were called Emperors, and many an Emperor of the kind styled himself, or was called by his subjects, Lord of the Three Worlds. Such a powerful kingdom, or empire if you will, was Kosala, a piece of the country, now known as Oudh, lying between the Himalayas and the Ganges, to the north-west of Benares. It is a rich country well watered by the Sarayu, a branch of the Ganges. Ayodhya was its chief city in the olden days. It is now a mass of ruins, but when Emperor Dasaratha, who claimed his descent from the Sun, reigned over it, it was a very big and famous city. The poet Valmiki, who was the first to sing of the story of Rama and Sita, speaks of this city very highly, and even after making allowance for the way of all our poets to praise such cities and their kings, it must have been a beautiful city and very comfortable to live in. It had broad streets and highways, the royal roads in it were kept sprinkled with water, to lay the dust, and were strewn with flowers. The houses were large and beautiful and their doors richly carved and adorned. Its lofty mansions and palaces had flags and streamers

gaily waving in the wind from their tops Well-skilled and famous artists and artisans lived in the city, as well as many dancing-masters, bards and minstrels, and skilled musicians and singers There were also a good many parks and pleasure-gardens, fit for princes to sport and walk about in Horses, elephants, cows, camels, mules, all of the best breeds, abounded in it Many petty chiefs came there to pay their dues to the Emperor, and merchants from other countries were also there, making themselves rich The royal palaces, set with precious stones and built on the grandest scale, abounded in beautiful women There was plenty of rice and sweet, pure water to be had in the city Warriors, well skilled in the use of the bow, the sword and other arms, and very able in hunting wild beasts, were there in thousands, but they were always just in their fights, and scorned to pursue the fleeing, the helpless, the childless, and those who hid themselves in fear This flourishing and famous city, so rich in all the arts and so plenteous in the good things of life, was guarded by a thick and high wall all round and a deep and broad moat outside the wall. There were also guns placed on all the four sides to defend it from enemies Indeed, it was impossible for any enemy to get into it or take it by force, hence the name *Ayodhya*

II. The King and the People.

DASARATHA CHAKRAVARTHI, the son of Aja, and of the famous line of Ikshvaku and Raghu, was a learned and wise man. He was a brave and renowned warrior, dreaded by his foes, but he loved his own subjects deeply and was tireless in seeking their welfare and making them happy. He prized truth above everything else, and never broke his plighted word. He never did aught to please himself, but was always eager to walk in the noble path of his kingly duties. He truly was worthy to be called a *Rajarishi*.

The King had eight principal ministers, of whom Sumantra was the chief. They were all wise and able men, very tactful, firm in keeping secrets, of righteous conduct, true and faithful to their king, and ever bent on bringing about his good. There were also many priestly advisers, headed by the great sage Vasishta. These Brahmans were all men who had spent many years in the pursuit of learning and wisdom, and in doing *tapas* to master their own senses. They were righteous, famous, truthful and patient. They were always cheerful, and when any one of them spoke, it was with a pleasant smile. Not in anger, not for love, nor for any gain in this world, would one of them ever speak a falsehood.

There was nothing going on in their own land or in other countries which these counsellors were not aware of by means of their spies and agents. They were all men well-trying by the King in need and difficulty, and then taken to his heart as his dear friends and advisers. They were so just and firm of mind, that if anything wrong was done even by one of their own children, they were ready to punish impartially. They sought to keep the King's treasury always full, and the army fit and able. But they never bore a grudge even to a foe if he was blameless. They were good to the good and a dread to the evil ones.

As all these wise and able men sought and wrought for the good of the country with one mind and with such a king at their head, the land was peaceful and happy, and evil-doers were rare in it. The people were learned and charitable and revered and loved their King. They were contented and happy and no one ever lusted after what was not his. They were rich in worldly goods as well as in all virtues, and they loved to tread in the path of truth and righteousness. Abounding in the milk of human kindness, they readily and freely helped any one found in need. Though their righteous life was like that of saintly men and women, they were not ascetics. They lived well, and loved to wear costly and beautiful ornaments,

such as coronets, ear and finger rings, armlets, bracelets and garlands of gold and precious stones. They were always clean and pure and kept their bodies fragrant with scents and flowers. They loved to wear bright and gay silks and fine clothes, and ate only pure and wholesome food. Each man followed the duties of his caste and there was much of mutual love, regard and help among them.

Thus reigned for many years Dasaratha, King of the Kosalas, rejoicing in the contentment and happiness of his people, which he ever sought to increase by all means in his power. Bounteous and charitable, with his fame as king and warrior waxing day by day and spreading all round, and aided by friendly counsellors and tributary princes, he shone in their midst like the moon among the stars, or like the sun shining on the world, surrounded by his attendant planets.



III. The Birth of the Princes.

BUT it is a common saying and a true one that nothing human is perfect in this world and so there was something lacking even in the happiness of such a monarch. Although Dasaratha was old and had ruled for many years, no child had been born to him by any of his three queens and so there was no one to mount

his throne after him. This was indeed a very sad disappointment, one of the saddest that could ever happen to any Hindu, and more so to a king like him. Our holy books say that it is necessary for an ordinary man to have at least one good and virtuous son to perform his funeral and speed his soul in the path of salvation. Be that as it may, a childless home must indeed be a sad one, however rich, luxurious and well-ordered it may otherwise be. A man may not perhaps feel the lack of a child in the full flush and pride of his youth, or even in his busy and ambitious manhood; but in the mellow evening of life, when his steps falter and his eyes grow dim, when he has run the race of life and won its crown, it must indeed be very sad for him to think that no child of his will ever bear his name and fame and be as a staff unto his hands and a light unto his feet, as he nears the dark valley of death. And if man, busy, scheming, restless man feels so, what shall we say of woman, whose world is mostly bounded by the four walls of her home, whose life is but one song of love, and whose wayward lord, fitful, fretful, fanciful, grumbling and impatient at best, be he never so loving and affectionate, waxes more and more so and perhaps breaks off altogether from the only bond that links her to him and to happiness, if life wanes away without that bond being made more strong by new

cords of love and new sources of mutual care, joy and affection? Verily, a childless Hindu wife is one of the most unfortunate and pitiable of God's creatures on earth. Such, at any rate, have been and will be the feelings of most of us, men and women.

You, my young reader, no doubt think that you love your father and mother well, perhaps the latter more, and they are very dear to you. But I know they have only a little corner in your heart, and even less in your thoughts which roam over the whole wide world, so new, so pleasant, so dazzling with all things bright and gay, and so full of fun and frolic to you. And you get vexed and angry with your dear parents if they cross you in your least wish, or do not readily respond to your wildest whim or fancy. But little do you reckon and less do you care to know how deeply, dearly, doatingly their hearts yearn towards you, how anxious and watchful they are lest any evil should befall you, how overborne with care and distress when you are ill, how eager and greedy that everything good and pleasant should be yours, how apprehensive lest you should do, foolishly or unwittingly, aught that would bring shame on the fair fame and name of the family; how while you lie in your tiny dreamless bed sleeping the innocent sleep of a playful day, they remain wakeful and busy, planning how to

secure the plums of life, the fattest and the juiciest ones too, if possible, for you, how they joy in your joy and grieve even for your childish frets and tears. Be sure of this, if ever any human being forgets himself in seeking the good of another, utterly, sincerely and whole-heartedly, it is when a parent seeks the good of his child. Therefore do all men of whatever colour, creed, caste, or calling, love to speak of God as their Father and themselves as His children. And truly has the poet sung that

“ A child more than all other gifts,
That earth can offer to decaying man,
Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts ’

In the midst of all his riches and power, King Dasaratha was sore at heart that he had no child to gladden his weary days, close his dying eyes and rule the land after he had been gathered to his fathers. With the help and advice of his friends and counsellors, he performed two great *yagams*, which none but a mighty king like him could perform. At last, by the grace of God, four sons were born to him by his three queens,—Kausalya, the senior queen, gave birth to Rama, Queen Kaikeyi gave birth to Bharata; and Queen Sumitra gave birth to Lakshmana and Satrughna. Glad was the heart of the old king when these princes were born to him, and gladder you may be sure, were his three queens, who loved each other like

dear sisters and shared the joys and griefs of their royal husband. Rich and bountiful were the gifts and presents the King gave away that day and gay and festive was every home and hearth in the city. The streets, we are told, became halls of dancing and music for the time being and everyone was glad and happy in the happiness of the old and well-beloved monarch. The princes were duly named, as I have already stated, on the eleventh day, and they grew apace like lion-cubs under the watchful eyes and loving care of their parents and their future subjects. All the four boys were handsome, and Rama the eldest was of a deep brown colour, which was charming to the eyes of all who saw him. The princes were carefully taught the *Vedas* and the *Dharma Sastras* which lay down the duties of life and they were also trained well in all feats of arms, riding horses and elephants and driving the war-chariot, hunting all kinds of fierce, wild beasts, and in all other things which men born to rule had to know in those days. They took to these studies and exercises wonderfully and soon became matchless for beauty, strength, valour and all kingly virtues and accomplishments.

If you have brothers and sisters, I am sure you love some one or two of them more than the rest. Of course, you love all of them, but

nevertheless, this or that brother or sister is after your own heart and likes you and is liked by you most. So also it happened among these four princes. Rama and Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrughna, formed two pairs drawn to and loving each other with something more than a common love. You will note that though Lakshmana and Satrughna were sons of the same mother, they did not join together, but so it was. We are told that Lakshmana looked and behaved as if he was Rama's own life moving in an outer form, so deeply and fondly did he love him. He was always glad to serve Rama, thought it was his own right and not of any one else, could not sleep without him or eat anything given him, without first giving Rama a share, and a lion's share too, I think; and he followed him wherever he went. Satrughna loved and served Bharata in the same way. Thus grew the princes day by day, gladdening the hearts of their parents and of all those who saw them and waxing like the moon in knowledge, wisdom, virtue, beauty, valour, skill in arms, and all the good qualities of head and heart that go to make a man.



IV. Rama wins his Spurs.

AND it came to pass one day that the old King, seeing that his sons had reached the proper age, thought of wedding them to suitable brides and was speaking about it to his friends and advisers in open court, when word was brought that the mighty sage Viswamitra had come to see the King and was awaiting his royal pleasure. You will learn the story of this sage from the lips of Satananda later on. I may however tell you now that he was a very great sage indeed, but so irritable withal, that I am afraid, he was more feared than loved wherever he went. King Dasaratha and his courtiers got up in a hurry on hearing the news and hastened to receive the holy man and show him all honour. After the first greetings were over and when they were all seated again in their proper places, Dasaratha humbly asked the sage to what cause he owed the high honour of his visit and forthwith vowed and passed his word that he would gladly fulfil the sage's wishes as soon as they were made known. This was, of course, unwise, to undertake to do a thing before you know what it is, but this seems to have been a failing with the old king, and you will learn hereafter how another such promise brought about a very unjust event which hastened his death and caused life-long

trouble and misery to all who were nearest and dearest to him.

Viswamitra was only too pleased that the great King treated him so and made such a promise, and he replied in these words —“O Lion among Kings! Born of a noble line of kings and having the sage Vasishtha for your *guru*, who knows to speak sweet words and entertain a guest better than you? I shall indeed tell you at once why I came to you and I hope that, as a great and true king, you will help me in my need and stand by your plighted troth I am now performing a *yagam* Some bad and wicked persons from the South, Rakshasas by birth, hinder me and try to mar all that I do I am unable to perform the holy rites and have therefore come to ask you for the help of your eldest son Rama Although he is a youth yet, I know he is a peerless warrior I shall also teach him many secret feats and tricks of arms Be not afraid that he is only a boy, for you do not know well his true worth and valour I therefore beg of you to send Rama with me to drive away these Rakshasas and enable me to finish the *yagam*” King Dasaratha fainted away on hearing these words, so great was his love for Rama and so much did he fear lest any evil should befall him And good cause had he to swoon, having foolishly passed his word first and knowing well that the curse

of the great sage was as powerful and long-reaching as his temper was short. In fact, no one cared or dared to cross this sage, or another, by name Durvasa, and they were the two dreaded 'dragons' of those days. When the King regained his senses after a while, he turned to Viswamitra and said in a low and humble tone — "Great Sage! My Child, the lotus-eyed Rama, is not even sixteen years of age. How can he fight the Rakshasas? I have a vast army and I shall myself go with you and fight them. Girt round by able warriors, I shall myself guard your *yagam*, bow in hand, and fight with your wicked foes till they turn back and flee, or I fall. My son Rama is a mere child yet, he is not well-skilled in arms nor has he ever been in battle till now. He knows nothing of the cunning and wickedness of the Rakshasas. I cannot part with my darling child even for a moment. Though I have four sons, Rama the eldest is dearest to my heart, and I therefore implore you, O thou matchless among sages! to take pity on me and not to ask for Rama. I shall myself go with you this instant and render the help you need."

When the King pleaded in this manner and refused to send Rama, Viswamitra became angry and replied: "You first promised to grant my request, O King, and now you go back on your plighted word. This is wrong and not at all

becoming in one of your noble lineage If you say so, I shall go back the way I came, for I shall have naught to do with a King who breaks his own word "

Then Vasishta spake and advised the King to send Rama with the sage, who was himself a redoubted and mighty warrior and would see that Rama came by no harm while in his charge At last the King agreed and Rama, and his other self Lakshmana, followed sage Viswamitra out of the city and into the forests, bow in hand, only too glad to see more of the world, I fancy. The King advised Rama, when he took leave of him, never to anger the great sage and to carry out his behests dutifully and readily On their way, Viswamitra taught the princes many a secret trick and feat of arms invaluable to a warrior, and whiled away the journey with stories and tales He also drew the attention of the two youths from time to time to the beauties of nature, of river, hill and dale, and told them many a local legend, famous and sacred in Aryan history and tradition. They slept that night in a holy hermitage near where the Sarayu falls into the Ganges The next morning they crossed the Ganges in a boat, marvelling at the mighty sound caused by the coming together of the two rivers Then they had to pass through a dense and fearful forest which was the abode of a Rakshasa princess.



Lessons in Archery.

named Thataka. Viswamitra wished Rama to fight and kill her, but the prince refused at first to aim his arrow at a woman. The sage, however, argued with him, saying that it was the duty of a Kshattrya prince to put down wickedness in whatever form met with and Rama agreed to do his bidding at last, remembering the parting advice of the King, his father. Then Rama fought Thataka and killed her. They passed that night in the forest, and the next day Viswamitra gave Rama some more rare arms that were kept secret and taught him their use. At last the princes reached the hermitage of the sage and enabled him to finish the *Yagam*, fighting and driving away the Rakshasas who sought to spoil the holy rites. One of these wicked persons who then escaped Rama's arrows was Maricha, whom we shall meet with later. Thus did Rama first win his spurs, fighting against the Rakshasas, who were really the non-Aryan inhabitants of the island of Lanka some of whom had been settled in Southern India by their King Ravana. Having thus fulfilled the task for which they were brought by the Sage, Rama and Lakshmana slept peacefully and without care that night. The next morning, after doing his *Sandhya* rites, Rama saluted Viswamitra and asked whether he and his brother could be of any more use to him. Viswamitra, and

the other sages who had come to witness his *yagam*, were then about to start for Mithila, the capital of the Videha country, to attend a *yagam* performed there by its King, Janaka. This Janaka was a monarch even more famous than Dasaratha, and there were few, even among Brahmin sages in those days, who could equal him in learning and wisdom. We hear of many learned Brahmans who humbly confessed their ignorance before him and learnt the great truths about the human soul, about God, and such other high things from his royal lips. He was, in fact, the greatest philosopher of his time, and we hear of him in many a famous *Upanishad*. Viswamitra therefore requested the princes to go with him to Mithila and added : "Not only can you witness King Janaka's *yagam*, O Rama, but you can also see something which may perhaps interest you more. There is a famous bow kept in the palace of Janaka which no prince has yet been able to bend or string. Many a renowned warrior has tried and failed shamefully. And you, O Lion among men ! will no doubt wish to see this wonderful bow and perhaps test your strength and skill on it." On hearing this, Rama readily agreed, and a large party consisting of the two princes, Viswamitra and numerous other holy Brahmans set out towards Mithila. They met with some wonderful adventures on the way and Viswa-

mitra whiled away the time as usual with many an ancient legend and myth, too long to be given here. I shall, however, briefly tell you, as an example of the rest, one of the legends narrated by him to Rama. This tale will prove to you the truth of the verses which tell you to "Try, try, try again."



V. The Story of Bhagiratha.

LONG before the time of Dasaratha, there was once a great king in Ayodhya called Sagara. He had two wives, of whom one bore him an only son Asamanjan and the other had numerous children, sixty-thousand, we are told! This Asamanjan was a bad and cruel prince and he took special delight in throwing children into the Sarayu river and witnessing their drowning. But he had a son, Amsuman, who was a just and brave prince. King Sagara wished to perform *Aswamedha yaga* or the horse-sacrifice in his old days and Prince Amsuman was given the task of following and guarding the devoted steed which was let loose. We are told that he who performs *yagas* goes to *swarga* or Heaven, and whoso performs a hundred of them becomes Indra, the King of the *Devas*. Indra therefore is jealous of all those who perform too many *yagas*, so he quietly stole away the horse let loose by King

Sagara and hid it. The *yaga* had to be stopped until the horse was found and King Sagara sent his sixty-thousand sons by his second wife to search for and recover the steed, bidding them dig through the earth even unto the nether world or *Patalaloka*, if the Rakshasas had hid it there. No one ever thought of Indra and his trick. The sixty-thousand, not finding the horse anywhere on the earth, began to dig through it, and the vast pit these sons of Sagara thus dug is now the bed of the Bay of Bengal, *Sagaram*. But they did not find the horse that way and came back to their father and told him so. King Sagara was very wroth and sent them back to dig further, dig, dig, dig for their very lives, until the horse was found. The obedient princes returned to their work and went on digging on all sides and deeper still, till they came across Sage Kapila, sitting in *nishtha*. They did not know who he was and their only care was to find the missing horse. To their wonder and gladness, they found the animal quietly grazing on the lawn behind where the sage was sitting. It was, of course, foolish of them, but without stopping to think or even ask any questions, they took the sage to be the thief. They raised a hue and cry against him from no fewer than sixty-thousand pairs of lungs and went to attack him with the spades, pick-axes and crow-bars they had

in their hands. They little dreamt that Indra was the thief and that he had hid the horse there, as the safest and most secret place, all unknown to the sage. Thus roused and rudely handled all on a sudden, Sage Kapila was naturally very angry, and so great and fiery was his wrath that all the sixty-thousand princes were at once burnt up and fell where they stood in a huge heap of ashes. Long did King Sagara wait for the return of his beloved sons, but in vain. Then he sent his grandson Amsuman to search for them and for the missing horse. Amsuman at last came to the spot where his uncles had been burnt to ashes and he wailed aloud in grief. He also saw the fatal steed still grazing there. The ashes had first to be dissolved in exceptionally holy water not then to be had on earth and the funeral performed for the sixty-thousand. So Amsuman came back with the horse alone and told his grandfather King Sagara everything. The horse having been brought back, the *yagam* was finished. Then King Sagara wished to appease the souls of his unfortunate sons by dissolving their ashes in Holy Ganges, and not knowing how to bring this about, he died of a broken heart. You should remember that the Ganges was not yet an earthly river and was said to be flowing somewhere in the high Heavens, hence the difficulty.

Amsuman succeeded Sagara on the throne, and Dilipa, his son, reigned after him. Both these kings died broken-hearted, owing to their inability to perform the sacred task. King Bhagiratha then mounted the throne and no child was born to him for a long time. He thought that this was because the funeral of his forefathers had not yet been performed and their shades appeased and he set him-self body and soul to that supreme filial duty. He betook himself to such severe and continued *tapas* that the great Creator Brahma appeared before him and told him that Holy Ganges was then in the abode of the Gods and that if she were to come down on the earth, none but the great Mahadeva could sustain the force of her descent. Then Bhagiratha directed his *tapas* and addressed his prayers towards Mahadeva and at last got His help. Holy Ganges descended on Mahadeva's head in the Kailas mountains and thence flowed down on the earth, following King Bhagnatha, who drove his car in front, showing her the way to the ashes of his forefathers. Such was the power of his penance and prayers. On the way, however, a mighty *rishi*, Janhu by name, was performing a *yagam* and the river flooded his hermitage. The *rishi* got angry and, strange to relate, drank up the river at one gulp, and Bhagiratha learnt the truth of the popular saying that "there is many



The Descent of the Ganges,

a slip between the cup and the lip." But Bhagiratha was not the man to be daunted by such a mishap and he persuaded the sage to let the river out through one of his ears. The river again followed Bhagnatha's car until she fell into the huge pit dug by Sagara's sons and washed away and purified the ashes. Perhaps the legend is a poetical account of the rising of the Ganges high up among the Himalaya Mountains, of her flowing into and out of a deep volcanic valley during her gradual course, and of her emptying herself at last into the ocean. It is a forcible story of the value of perseverance in human affairs and shows that to perseverance nothing is impossible. The popular saying *Bhagiratha prayathnam* and the fact that the holy Ganges is also known as *Bhagnathi* bear witness to the greatness of King Bhagiratha, who was indeed, one of the forefathers of Rama.



VI. The Story of Viswamitra.

HEARING such tales and legends and looking with delight on the varying scenes of hill, river and jungle, Rama reached Mithila, with his faithful brother and his holy companions. The thousands of flags and banners waving gaily in the wind from towers, domes, house-tops and other high places in the beautiful city

of Mithila, which was the capital of the Videh country, seemed as though the city beckoned Rama from afar with her thousands of hands to come and wed Sita, his wife-to-be, who was the proudest and most beautiful of her possession. When King Janaka heard that Sage Viswamitra had come to witness his *yagam*, he was very glad, and received him and his party with great honour and praised him to his heart's content. If olden books speak true, it was very common in those days to praise a distinguished guest to his face in a manner which would not be considered fitting now except in complimentary addresses to retiring officials; but this, by the way. Sage Satyananda was the chief priest at King Janaka's court and he narrated the life-story and mighty deeds of Sage Viswamitra to those who were assembled there, somewhat as follows:—"This great Brahmarishi, Viswamitra, was a Kshattriya by birth and a brave and powerful king in his early days. He was a great and renowned warrior and none was more skilled in all feats of arms. While out hunting in the forests one day, he came to the *asrama* of Sage Vasishtha, who feasted the King and his large retinue in a grand manner. Viswamitra wondered how a Brahmin hermit was able to do so in the midst of a forest and he learnt that Vasishtha had a divine cow, *Kamadhenu*, 'desire-giver,' by whose help the sage was



The Birth of Sakuntala

able to play the host to a mighty monarch. The King wished to get this cow for himself, but Vasishtha would not part with it for love or money. Then Viswamitra became angry and tried to take away the cow by force and made war on the sage; but his army was defeated and put to rout and he got worsted in the end, all apparently by the virtue of the divine cow. This made the King pause and think. He soon found out that the cow was a mere symbol, and that Vasishtha's great *tapas* and righteousness lay behind it. "We needs must love the highest when we see it," and King Viswamitra at once gave up his throne and royal state and betook himself to *tapas*. Indra got alarmed and sent the *Devadasi* Menaka to tempt the King and mar his *tapas*. She succeeded for a while and Sakuntala (perhaps the sweetest and best-known name in all Sanskrit literature) was born to them. But the King soon found out his folly and resumed his *tapas* with redoubled vigour. During their quarrel over *Kamadhenu*, Vasishtha had taunted King Viswamitra on his Kshattrya birth and the King had vowed that he would change his birth by *tapas* and force of righteousness and become a *Brahmarishi* like Vasishtha himself. So great was his *tapas* that he at last succeeded in this and Vasishtha had to acknowledge openly that he was a *Brahmarishi*, and his equal."

Satananda then narrated some of Viswamitra's mighty deeds after he became a Brahmin Sage, how he saved King Trisanku and sent him to *Deraloka* even though he was in a *Chandala* body, how he saved from an early death the Brahmin lad Sunaschepa whom his own parents had, when in sore straits from famine, cruelly sold to a king to be killed as a human sacrifice, and so forth But I cannot wait to tell you of all these feats of his I only wish you to note that his story teaches us some great truths we have since forgotten and by forgetting which we suffer so much in these days Caste did not go solely by birth, nor were the rules about it so strict and unreasonable as now People of different castes could eat together and even intermarry, and what was more, one of a lower caste by birth could raise himself to a higher caste by virtue of his life and character Viswamitra indeed, seems to have been a man of broad views and a great reformer, and the account of his rivalry and quarrels with Vasishta refers probably to one of the many disputes between the priests and the warriors among the Aryans, and the final acknowledgment of the rights and high status of the latter by the former



VII. Bending the Bow.

AFTER he had duly honoured Viswamitra, King Janaka turned to the two princes and asked the Sage who they were. Viswamitra informed Janaka of their noble lineage and also praised their valour and prowess which had guarded his *yaga* from the Rakshasas; and King Janaka was very pleased, and marvelled at it. The next morning, Sage Viswamitra took the two princes to King Janaka's court by invitation, and they walked along the beautiful and busy streets of Mithila, admiring its riches and splendour. Before reaching the *darbar* hall in the King's palace, they had to pass by the apartments of Sita, the daughter of King Janaka, a princess of surpassing beauty. She was standing on a balcony with some of her maidens and she chanced to see Rama as he came along, and Rama too saw her, and their eyes met for a few seconds. And it was love at first sight and it seemed to them that each was made for the other. Rama, of course, had to pass on with the Sage, but the bright eyes of Sita had lit the lamp of love in his youthful heart and he was a different man from that moment. Sita too was no more a simple and innocent maiden and she vowed within herself to wed Rama and none other. There were no doll-marriages of young children in those days, but only young men and

women, knowing the meaning and duties of a married life, entered into the sacred union.

After the first greetings were over, Viswamitra requested King Janaka to have the famous bow brought for the princes to see. King Janaka replied :—"The mighty bow is, indeed, a sacred weapon, said to have been used by the great god Siva Himself once, and an heirloom in my family. I have vowed that he who seeks the hand of my daughter Sita shall first prove his manliness and prowess by bending this bow. Mindful of her great beauty, many princes have come to my court and tried to bend the mighty bow, but in vain, and those who came with their hearts full of hope and pride have gone back in shame and despair. I shall of course show this weapon to Prince Rama of the great line of Raghu and if he is able to bend and string it, I shall be happy to give my daughter Sita in marriage to him. My daughter too has vowed to wed only that prince who performs this feat "

The King then ordered the bow to be brought into the court-chamber and it was so done. It was kept inside a box and with the permission of the Sage and the King, Rama opened the box and lifted up the huge and mighty bow. He held it by the middle in his left hand and while the King, the Sage and all present stood around in breathless expectation and wonder, Rama



Rama breaks Siva's Bow.

gracefully and lightly bent the bow and strung it. Then he pulled back the string to test its strength, when, lo! the mighty bow cracked and broke into two in the middle, unable to bear the strain. Was it Rama's strength and skill, or the new-born love for Sita in his heart which made him do the mighty feat, which had baffled many a famous warrior before? There were loud thunders of applause from all present as the bow broke, and Janaka's heart was glad. The shout of joy which echoed and re-echoed through the corridors of the palace reached the ears of Sita, sitting love-lorn in her chamber, and soon after, one of her maidens came dancing and singing for mere joy with the gladsome news that Rama, the prince of the beautiful complexion and with eyes like the lotus, had broken the mighty bow and won Sita's hand. Need I say that young Sita's heart was full of joy and happiness at that moment?

King Janaka then sent a royal embassy to King Dasaratha's court to inform that monarch of his son's glorious feat, offering his daughter to Prince Rama and requesting Dasaratha to come at once to Mithila with all his people for the happy wedding. The decorations of the city for the marriage festivities were also ordered to begin at once.



VIII. The Wedding of the Princes.

YOU will remember that Dasaratha had heard no news at all of his beloved Rama, after having parted with him most unwillingly and anxiously, and for aught he knew, his son might have fallen a prey to the wicked and wily Rakshasas. Right glad was he therefore to hear the tidings brought by Janaka's messengers and he started for Mithila the very next day with all his family and a vast retinue. Janaka received him with royal honours and the two old Kings embraced each other joyfully. A great *darbar* was held the next day which both the Kings attended with all their courtiers and to which all the neighbouring princes were also invited.

The Sage Vasishta got up and proclaimed the name and fame of Dasaratha, narrated his noble lineage and requested King Janaka to give his daughters Sita and Urmila in marriage to the two princes Rama and Lakshmana.

King Janaka heard this with pleasure and then he proclaimed his own noble birth and lineage even unto the twentieth generation. "My father crowned me," continued he, "and leaving the kingdom and my younger brother Kusadhwaja in my charge, he retired into the forests in his old age to seek the salvation of his soul. I was ruling the ancestral kingdom

righteously, when King Suthanva of the city of Sankasya unjustly laid siege to Mithila and demanded my daughter Sita in wedlock and the sacred bow of Siva as a gift. I did not agree to it and made war on him and killed him in battle. Then I gave the conquered country Sankasya to my brother Kusadhwaja and crowned him king over it. Right glad am I now to give my daughters in marriage to these brave and noble princes and Rama has indeed already won Sita from me by breaking the mighty weapon. The third day from this is a lucky and auspicious day and I request that the weddings may be performed then with all due pomp and ceremony."

When Janaka ceased speaking, Vasishta and Viswamitra consulted together for a while and then addressed him in this manner.—"O Lion among men! your race and the race of Dasaratha are the most renowned on this earth and matchless in the number of brave and noble princes who have been born in them. In wealth, in beauty, in virtue and in every way Rama and Lakshmana are the princes best fitted for your daughters Sita and Urmila. On this auspicious occasion, we desire that some other happy events should also take place. Has not your righteous brother Kusadhwaja two daughters who are princesses of peerless beauty? Let those two maidens be wedded to Bharata and Satrugna respectively on the same day and in

the same pavilion. King Dasaratha's four sons are like the guardian lords of the earth and by giving your brother's daughters in wedlock to Bharata and Satrugghna you will further strengthen the bonds of kinship and love between the two royal houses" Janaka heard this with pleasure and replied with joined palms saluting the two sages Vasishta and Viswamitra. "When two such peerless *Rishis* so eagerly seek to increase my wealth and fame, what greater fortune can befall my house? Most gladly do I and my brother here agree to this and let these four brave and valiant princes wed on the same day the four princesses of my house. By bringing about these unions, you have made me your *sishya* for ever and I request the two sages to sit upon my throne which, together with my kingdom, belongs hereafter as much to King Dasaratha as to me, and so is Ayodhya mine too and both are yours, O noblest of Sages! Order everything as you wish."

King Dasaratha was very glad to hear these words and he praised Janaka and the marriages were settled accordingly. The ceremonies began the next day with gifts of gold, milch cows, and other presents to Brahmans. That evening, there came to Dasaratha, his brother-in-law Yudhajt, prince of Kekaya and brother to Queen Kaikeyi, with an errand from his father to see his nephew Bharata and take him to his

grand-father's home Dasaratha was glad to receive so near a kinsman at such a time.

On the next morning, King Dasaratha, after finishing his ablutions and prayers, came to the wedding pavilion, surrounded by his counsellors, courtiers and a numerous retinue. At the same time, Rama and his three brothers, after finishing all the preliminary ceremonies and wearing the sacred *kankanas* of wedlock, were brought there by Sage Vasishta.

Vasishta then went in and addressed King Janaka in these words "King Dasaratha has come here with his four sons, after completing all the ceremonies prior to wedding your daughters, and they await the gift of the princesses. The rite of giving and taking has to be performed as laid down in the holy books. I request you therefore to make the gift of your daughters on this auspicious occasion and earn for yourself matchless *punnyam*. It is yours to give and ours to receive now."

King Janaka replied "Why ask me? Whose right is it to order here? Why should you hereafter ask any one in your own house? Is not this kingdom as much yours as mine? I have brought my daughters here, decked in silks, gems and flowers, and they too have finished the prescribed rites and we have been awaiting your arrival. Proceed with the wed-

ding soon and let not the lucky moment be missed "

Then King Dasaratha and his sons entered the grand pavilion with their followers, and King Janaka requested Vasishta to perform the wedding of Rama and Sita first, with the help of the other priests present Vasishta agreed and took his seat with Viswamitra, Satananda and other learned and holy men They raised a dais in the centre as laid down in the Shastras and decked it with sandal paste, coloured powder and flowers Golden *palika* cups were placed duly on the dais and water-pots purified with sacred grass and flowers Vessels full of seedlings were placed on the four sides of the dais which shone with censers, lamps, water-vessels and other holy things required for the ceremony Vasishta placed the sacred grass round the dais and began the *homa* with the *mantras* of the marriage sacrament Then King Janaka brought his daughter Princess Sita, bedecked in silks and gems from head to foot, and made her stand facing Prince Rama in front of the sacred fire He then gladly gave her away to Rama in these words —

"I give you this Sita, my daughter, to stand by and help you in each and every duty of your life May you fare well always Here, take her hand in yours She will always look upon her husband as her sole help

and prop I bless her, and may she never part from you, but ever be with you even as your own shadow." Saying these words, Janaka poured water into Rama's hands with *mantras* and made a gift of Sita to him, amidst a shower of flowers, peals of music and the applause and blessings of the elders and the sages present. Urmila to Lakshmana, Mandavi to Bharata, and Srutakirti to Satrugna were similarly given away and joined in holy wedlock.

You may have heard that man proposes and God disposes. The following pages will show how these weddings, performed with so much rejoicing and under such happy augury, by no less renowned and learned a priest than Vasishtha, and on a day fixed by the great Janaka, actually fared in life, and what domestic and other happiness fell to the share of the princes and their brides.



IX. The Story of Parasurama.

THE day after the wedding, Sage Viswamitra took leave of the Kings, the princes and the other sages, and wended his way towards the Himalayas to resume his *tapas*. Then King Dasaratha also started for his capital, Ayodhya, with his sons, their brides, and his numerous followers. King Janaka gave many useful and

rich gifts to his daughters, befitting his high estate: such as cows, elephants, horses, and chariots; warriors, maidens of honour richly dressed, and other attendants; gold, silver, pearls, corals, blankets, white and coloured silks, and so forth. He also went with Dasaratha for the first two stages of his journey as a mark of regard, and then returned to Mithila, after taking leave of his kinsmen and guests. Dasaratha pursued his way towards Ayodhya, where another exciting event happened.

I told you that Dasaratha was a great warrior, as was also Viswamitra when he was a king. But the greatest warrior of those days and the man most dreaded by all other warriors was a Brahman, Parasurama by name. Parasurama simply means Rama with the Parasu, a kind of battle-axe, and he was so known because his chief weapon was a battle-axe, just as the hero of our story was known as Kothanda-Rama, or Rama with the Kothandam or bow, and another as Bala-Rama, or Rama the Strong. The story of this Parasurama is an interesting one. His parents were very holy, nay half godlike personages, as their names show,—Jamadagni Bhagavan and Renuka Devi. His mother Renuka Devi was a chaste and pious woman. She daily went to the river to fetch water for her husband's morning rites. One morning, when Parasurama was yet a youth, Renuka Devi went to the

river to bring water as usual and there she happened to see a *Gandharva* who passed by. He was so strikingly beautiful to look at that Renuka Devi wondered at it, and thought much of his beauty within her heart. A bad or impure heart is much worse, they say, than a bad or impure act by itself; because we can judge of the effects of any act, but not of thought which is the source or spring of all action. The evil thought in Renuka Devi's mind tainted her moral nature, and with her mind seething with passion and shame, she was long in returning home. On reaching the *asrama*, she was ashamed of the delay and of her impure thought, and stood with down-cast and tearful eyes before her saintly husband. Jamadagni Bhagavan had waited sometime for his wife and then, by the force of his *tapasic* power, he had learnt the true facts and his wife's sad plight. He grew angry and jealous, and ordered one of his sons to kill his mother as she had proved unfaithful to him. This son refused to do such an unnatural deed and so did two others of his sons. Enraged still more by the disobedience of his children, he turned to his last son Parasurama and bade him kill his unworthy mother. Parasurama bent his head to his father's feet and with his axe, he felled down his mother where she stood. He then came back to his father and saluted him again. Jamadagni Bhagavan was greatly

pleased and he embraced his only obedient son lovingly and told him to name any boon he liked, and Parasurama promptly replied that he wanted his mother back alive. Having already passed his word, and with his anger somewhat appeased by now, Jamadagni Bhagavan yielded, and by the force of his *tapas*, Renuka Devi regained her life, to repent of her evil thought and live happily ever after with her husband and children. Such was Parasurama, and taking delight in the exercise of arms, he became in course of time the most skilled and powerful warrior of his age.

His father Jamadagni Bhagavan was killed by a Kshattriya king in a quarrel and on this, Parasurama vowed that he would root out the race of the Kshattriyas from the earth and he made war on Kshattriyas and killed all of them he met, as many as twenty-one times. He used to do *tapas* to gain more strength and power, in the intervals of this wholesale slaughter.

This mighty warrior, most dreaded of all Kshattriyas and especially by King Dasaratha, now appeared on the scene, having heard of Rama's feat in bending and breaking the famous bow, and Dasaratha fainted on seeing him. Parasurama was a fierce-looking man, with red, unkempt, matted hair, and eyes that seemed to ray forth blood and fire. He came straight to Rama and said:

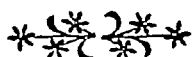
“Do not be alarmed, Rama, you are a mere child yet and I do not wish to fight you. I have, however, heard that you have bent and broken the bow of Siva kept by King Janaka. It was an old and rusty weapon, I know, with a slight crack in the middle, but here is another bow, the bow of Vishnu, and if you can bend it, I shall without fighting you, acknowledge your superiority. You are a Kshattrya and I have fought and killed your clansmen twenty-one times, but if you bend this bow, I shall think myself defeated and retire from the world.”

So saying, Parasurama gave into Rama's hands a huge and mighty bow, as straight as an arrow and as stiff as a pillar of stone. Rama spake not a word in reply, nor was he in the least daunted by any fear. He took the weapon from Parasurama's hands, and feeling that the beautiful and frightened eyes of Sita were anxiously fixed on him, he took a firm stand and gracefully bent the bow. Fixing an arrow to it, he *then* addressed Parasurama in these words: “My arrows never miss their aim, boastful Sir, nor do I ever bend a bow in vain. You are a Brahman and a holy Sage, and so I cannot kill you. Where then shall I aim this arrow?” Parasurama was humbled in a trice and he meekly replied, “I acknowledge you as my superior, great Kothanda-Rama, and my day is over. Since you will not kill me, I give you all

my *punya* for an aim, and I shall at once retire far away into the forests and never more molest any of your race "

So saying, Parasurama went back the way he came, ashamed and crest-fallen

When King Dasaratha recovered from his swoon and heard what had happened, he could hardly believe his ears, and his heart was glad, even more so than on the day when Rama was born to him. They then returned to Ayodhya, and the people welcomed their old king and their newly-wedded princes and their brides with the utmost joy. Having thus passed the stage of a *Brahmacharya*, the Princes entered on the next stage, that of *Grihastha* or householder, and lived happily with their wives, serving their parents and elders and making glad the hearts of all who had anything to do with them. Dasaratha sent Prince Bharata on a visit to his uncle after some time and Satrugna of course, accompanied him.



X. The King seeks Rest.

BHARATA and Satruglna lived in the Kekaya country with their uncle and grandfather. Yudhajit treated them like his own sons and spared nothing to make their stay happy. But not a day passed on which the old monarch did not long for the return of his absent sons. The princes too, in the midst of their pleasures and amusements, often thought of their home and their dear parents and brothers.

Born to him as they were in his old age, and when he had given up all hope of ever having such a blessing, Dasaratha loved his sons with a deep and growing affection, and Rama, his first-born and the most handsome and princely of them all, he loved even more than the rest. Without a peer in feats of arms, learned and sagacious beyond his years, keenly jealous for the fair name and honour of his family, ever reverential towards his elders, of soft speech and winning manners, truthful, noble and brave, that Prince was indeed the idol of his father's heart. And his patience and kindly condescension to even the poorest, eager pity for all suffering, high ideal of kingly duty, ardour for justice, and above all, genuine sympathy and love for his father's subjects, made him equally

beloved of the people No wonder then that the old Emperor, weary with age and the load of sovereignty, now sought to shift the burden on to younger and such able shoulders and enjoy a little rest ere he was gathered to his fathers. The King thought that the absence of Bharata, the only possible rival, was favourable for the crowning of Rama as his successor, and a dream boding no good to himself spurred him on. But mighty Emperor though he was, he would not name even his eldest son as heir to the throne without the consent of his own counsellors, the subject-chieftains, and the people. He therefore summoned a grand council of them all and told them of his heart's yearning. "Ye all know how I and my forefathers have cherished and fostered this vast kingdom, even as our child. Unmindful of personal comforts and sparing myself no trouble, I have done my best to walk in the ancient path of kingly duty, and I have spent all my long life in guarding and furthering the welfare of my subjects. I am very old now and wish to lay down the heavy burden, and rest awhile ere I depart this life. My eldest son, Rama, is an able and worthy Prince, as you are all aware, and I have no doubt, he will rule you well and to your satisfaction. I therefore wish to crown him as heir-apparent. If this be pleasing and agreeable to you all, I request you to give me your unanimous consent, and also to

tell me what else I should do to bring this about. I may be speaking to you thus merely out of a father's fondness, or an old man's desire for rest and ease. Consider it well therefore without fear or favour and let me know what you think of it. Impartial and supreme truth and justice alone can stand for ever in this world, and do us most good." The Brahmans, the princes, the citizens and the villagers there assembled heard the King's noble words with joy, and after considering the matter well among themselves, declared their glad assent.

The King wished to test them further, or perhaps their too ready and joyful welcome to his proposal piqued his royal heart, and so he addressed them again in these words: "No sooner have the words fallen from my lips, O ye princes and peoples, than you are eager to welcome Rama as your King. This makes me doubt whether you have thought well and earnestly of this matter. While I am ruling you righteously, why do you all seek so to have my son Rama as my successor?"

Then they praised the many good and noble qualities of Rama and said that he was a prince well worthy of his great father and quite fitted to succeed him on the throne. Right glad was the king to hear his people so praise his well-beloved son. The next day was auspicious for the coronation, and orders were given forthwith

to decorate the city and get everything ready for the morrow's ceremony

Dasaratha then sent for his son to acquaint him of his and the people's wish. When Rama came and after saluting him, stood before him respectfully, the King took hold of his hands and lovingly drew him to an honoured seat beside his throne. He then addressed him as follows, in the presence of the great gathering of his subjects. "Eldest of my sons and born to my worthy and senior queen, need I say, good and noble prince, that I love thee dearly? As thou hast won the hearts of all these people by thy great virtues, I mean to crown thee to-morrow as hen to this kingdom. I know thou art well-fitted in every way to rule this land, but of the deep love I bear thee, I wish to give thee some advice for thy greater welfare and success. Seek to be more humble in heart than even now and control thy senses with an ever-watchful care. Guard thyself against lust and anger and the evils arising from them. Attend personally to matters that need it, make good use of other people's brains, and seek always and by all means to please thy subjects. Nor shouldst thou fail to keep thy arsenal and coffers well-filled. His friends and the gods are ever glad to hear a people praise their monarch out of the goodwill and joy in their hearts. Therefore, my son, I charge thee to ever control thy mind and under-

take this task of government " Noble words, these, and a high ideal indeed of kingship !

The meeting then broke up, but the King again sent for Rama to his private chamber in the palace and told him of his desire for rest and the bad dream which made him hasten the coronation, while he was yet hale in mind and body He then bade him fast that night with his wife Sita, lying on a grass mat, thus doing penance and preparing himself for the sacred task he was to undertake on the morrow. He added " No doubt, Bharata is a good man and an obedient brother, righteous and dutiful in his behaviour, and one that keeps his senses under strict control Still the mind of man is fickle by nature, and the minds of even the truly great, sometimes change by evil precepts. Therefore is it that I have decided to crown thee on the morrow Go and prepare thyself as I bade thee "

The sunset of his life, or perhaps his knowledge of his youngest queen's nature and the memory of a promise he had given her father before wedding her, seems to have given the King a strange foresight, and some shadow of the coming events already darkened his mind

On taking leave of his father, Rama went to see his mother Kausalya, and he found her already engaged in worship and thanksgiving to God, on learning the happy news His brother

Lakshmana and his mother Sumitra were also with her, as well as his own wife Sita. They were all very joyful, of course, and Kausalya blessed her son in these words: "Child of my loins, may you live for ever! May all obstacles vanish! May you always gladden the hearts of my kinsfolk and those of Sumitra. I bare thee on an auspicious day and under a lucky star, and your conduct has pleased your royal father. My devotion to God and my fasts and penances have not been in vain; for the good fortune of Ikshvaku's kingly race is to be thine to-morrow."

Rama then returned to his own palace with his wife Sita and there observed the prescribed penances under Vasishtha's guidance.

Though there was only a little time, so glad were the people at the prospect of having their beloved Rama as ruler, that the whole city soon put on a gay and festive garb under their willing and able hands, and the priests got ready the sacred things needed for the rites. We are told that each man felt as glad as if he himself was to be crowned on the morrow, and the women welcomed with joy the news of the crowning of the charming prince who was the husband of the good and beautiful Sita.



XI. The Scene in the Sulks-room.

ON that night, there was only one home in all that gay and festive city where there was silent fasting and prayer, that of the crown-prince-elect; and there was only one place where envy and malice were hatching a plot of far-reaching unhappiness and ruin, it was in the king's palace itself.

The princes and people had been called in, consulted and an event of the greatest importance to the kingdom decided on, to take in a few hours on the morrow. Yet, strange to say, the queens had been told nothing about it by the king, and while two of them, including the mother of the heir-apparent, had only heard of it through their maids, the third and favourite queen was still quite in the dark. Perhaps women took no interest in political affairs in those far-off days, and were not brought into confidence by their royal consorts. Such a measure must have been on the king's mind for a good while before taking it outwardly, and he was not merely a king, also a husband and a father. I rather surmise that Dasaratha, fearing opposition and trouble, purposely hid his intention from his wives to the very last, and meant the event to pass off as a *coup d'état*, a sudden stroke of policy.

Manthara, a hump-backed woman, and known therefore as Kooni, was at the head

Queen Kaikeyi's household. An orphan of unknown parentage, she had been Kaikeyi's nurse and then become her maid, and had accompanied the princess to her husband's country on her marriage. The two loved each other like mother and daughter, and Kooni was ever a jealous and jealous watcher of her mistress's dignity and welfare. Queen Kaikeyi, whom Dasaratha married late in life, was beautiful and young, a stranger from far-off Kekaya in the north-west; and her advent could not have been quite welcome to the other queens. Being young, inexperienced and among strangers, she naturally was guided by her old nurse and maid, who knew much more of the outside world, and who was besides, her sole and trusted friend in her new home.

Manthara saw the city decorated, and the joyous festivities of the people, and learning the reason therefor, she hastened to inform her mistress. Queen Kaikeyi was at first glad to hear the news, for Rama had always shown her the greatest regard, and she knew how much the king and the people loved him, and he was the eldest son. But Manthara soon placed the matter before her in a very different light. She pointed out how, by the coronation of Rama, her rival Sausalya would become the King's mother and all-powerful, and how she and her son Bharata would have to look up to her and to Rama and

Sita for even little favours, and meekly obey their bidding. She blamed her for being so dull and foolish, and accused her of being her own son's enemy in not seeking his welfare during his absence. If Rama gained the throne, then *his* son would succeed him, and Bharata and all who belonged to him would for ever be little more than slaves in the kingdom. Bharata was a great and noble prince, well fitted to succeed his father who had indeed promised him the throne before her marriage. Rama knew this, and would out of envy and fear, banish him from the kingdom, as soon as he was crowned. Kaikeyi was by nature an ambitious and strong-willed woman, and her royal husband's marked love and partiality for her had made her a little haughty and vain. The old nurse therefore skilfully played on the weak points in her character, and she became soon as eager as the nurse to get her own son Bharata crowned instead of Rama. Kooni thereupon praised her mistress for her good sense, and advised her how best she could bring about Bharata's coronation. She reminded her of the two boons which the king had promised her once for saving his life when he fainted on the field of battle from wounds, and how she had not availed herself of them yet. She told her to ask for them now, after first getting him to promise their grant. She should ask for Bharata's coronation and

Rama's banishment as the two boons. She urged that Bharata could not be safe or secure on the throne as long as his elder brother Rama was near by; and that his exile was therefore quite necessary to make her son's rule sure and enduring. There is a tradition that Rama, when a boy, once aimed a pebble at Kooni's humpback in play, and that she hated him for it ever after.

Kaikeyi approved of this plan, and thanking her maid heartily, dismissed her to get ready for the meeting with her royal husband. She betook herself to the sulks-room, and throwing away all her ornaments and flowers, she lay down on the bare floor, feigning great grief and anger.

After giving the last orders for the morrow's ceremony, Emperor Dasaratha entered the palace of his favourite queen to tell her himself of his resolve. Not finding her in her chamber, he asked a maid who reported that for some unknown reason, the queen had gone into the sulks-room in a great rage. He at once went into that room and found his beloved queen lying on her face on the bare ground, her jewels and flowers strewn on the floor, and her long, beautiful hair lying dishevelled all about her. He raised her up tenderly with both his arms, but she pushed them aside and again fell to the ground weeping bitterly. He then begged of her to tell him the reason for her grief, whether he had

offended her in any way unwittingly, or whether any one else had wronged her; and he promised to do all possible amends that very moment. He assured her of his boundless love again and again, and asked her to speak out her mind and thus give him a chance of proving his love. She then told him, amid much sobbing and sighing, that she cherished a certain wish in her heart and that she would reveal it only if he would take an oath to carry it out. The king took this for a mere woman's whim or fancy, and smiled at her silliness in thus making a mountain of a molehill. He gently drew her head on to his lap and caressing her fondly, he swore by his dear son Rama and by all the *punya* he had ever earned in his life, to carry out her wish forthwith, and besought her to name it. You may remember how this king made such a promise once before to the sage Viswamitra in haste and then sorely repented of his foolishness at leisure. But all had ended well then, and so perhaps he had failed to take a lesson from it.

On hearing the king's vow, the wily queen laughed to herself. She then thanked him for his kindness, and solemnly called upon all the Gods, the planets and the stars, everything in creation, in fact, to bear witness to the king's oath. She then reminded him of the two boons he had promised her many years before for sav-

ing his life, and said that she desired to get them now. The king still suspected nothing. you must remember that he had not yet informed her of his intention to crown Rama the next day, and so perhaps thought that the boons she wanted could not in any way refer to it. He therefore told her to hesitate no longer, but name the boons at once, so that he could grant them, and then they could be happy together. Overjoyed at the success of her scheme, Kaikeyi requested the king to crown her own son Bharata as heir and to exile Rama into the forests for fourteen years. The king was simply stunned by this. He could hardly believe his ears. He wondered whether he was dreaming or awake, or whether his mind was wandering. It was some time before he could see clearly how he had been hopelessly trapped. He fumed with rage and grief and cursed and begged her by turns. He blamed himself for his blind folly. He swore that he would die the moment his dear son Rama left the city. He fell down at her feet and entreated her to pity his grey hairs, to have some mercy on him for the sake of their former love at least. He pointed out how she would earn everlasting sin and shame by such conduct, that it was quite unjust and unlawful, that Bharata himself would not agree to it. "I will give you my very eyes, O my well-beloved queen and daughter of the generous

and noble king of Kekaya," pleaded he, his eyes streaming with tears, "my very life is yours for the asking, and you know it. Take this crown and this empire if you will, for your son. But I beseech you, I impore you, forget only that other thing. I have plighted my word and you know, I will not go back upon it. Why do you then torment me cruelly in this manner? Even a malevolent demon will yield and show some mercy at the sight of such grief as mine. Is this little favour then too much for me to expect at your hands?"

Queen Kaikeyi was as firm as she was heartless, and her royal husband's prayers and pleadings were alike vain. She only appealed to his vow and asked him to redeem his plighted word, if he was indeed the true and honourable king he professed to be. Dasaratha, the rightful heir to a famous line of kings and custodian of the fair name and honour of his race, had too high and too strict a sense of the value of his plighted word as a monarch and of his duty to truth, to go back on his promise, and he doted on his bewitching queen too fondly to face her displeasure and wrath. So he weakly gave in to her and fainted away, through excessive grief and in the agony of remorse.



XII. By Order of the King.

SOME generations ago, and till quite lately in certain countries, the gentlemen of Europe had a queer Code of Honour which obliged them to shoot each other on the slightest provocation or injury, fancied or otherwise. Human lives were held dirt-cheap, and risked and lost daily for the sake of a mere senseless bubble, and by professed Christians whose God has included "Thou shalt not kill," among the most holy of his commandments. They thus readily and cheerfully died for their faith in a vague and foolish phantasm of their own creation. And our ancient kings had a Code of Truthfulness which seems to us of these later days, who have been rightly or wrongly blamed by others for lacking a due sense of its sanctity, as rather stilted, too literal, and somewhat inexplicable. But they too died for that faith, as Dasaratha for example, and what is in fact much harder, some of them lived in it and suffered terribly for it. witness the lives of Rama, Yudhishtra, and Harischandra. They had such a deep-rooted and sure faith in that code that they did not hesitate to bring down the utmost misery and pain not only on themselves, but even on others who had no part or lot in the particular incident. They were certainly in grim earnest, and we cannot but admire them for it. But I,

for one, must confess that I sometimes do not understand them or their code fully.

Dasaratha, for example, banished his blameless son and then gave up his life rather than fail in his promise to his wife. But he had already, and in the presence of the princes and people, named Rama as his successor. How could he violate *that* and not be untrue to his word? And is a promise, however solemnly made, but really obtained by fraud, more sacred and binding than one made deliberately, willingly, and with a full knowledge of its significance? Has any man, much less a king, because he has foolishly passed his word, a right to do such an act of downright injustice and inflict such suffering on others? There are scores of such instances if there is one in the lives of these noble martyrs to Truth, and to me at least it seems often like straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel without even wincing. And again, has a king no other duty than keeping his word? What about the welfare of his people and their united wishes? The matter is altogether perplexing to me. But to go on with my story.

The day dawned on a gay and brilliant city where men and women in thousands were soon filling the streets and the glorious pavilion where the ceremony was to take place, amid tumultuous music and rejoicing. The priests

began their rites early, anxious not to miss the auspicious moment, and the princes and the people, in gala dress and with their presents to the Prince on his coronation, were ready at an early hour. But there was no sign of the king. Then sage Vasishtha sent Sumantra, the eldest and best beloved of Dasaratha's ministers, to the king's palace to apprise him that everything was ready, and bring him soon, as the hour was near at hand. On reaching the palace, Sumantra could not see the king, but Queen Kaikeyi informed him that he had passed a sleepless night and was scarcely out of bed yet, and she told the minister to fetch Rama. The king faintly echoed this order from behind the screens, and Sumantia thereupon hurried to the palace of Prince Rama. The Prince's friends and retainers and hundreds of priests and other citizens were waiting there already, and numerous bands of music and other paraphernalia of a grand royal procession filled the courtyard. Rama himself was ready and awaiting the summons to be crowned. On learning Sumantra's errand, he hastened to obey, after assuring his wife Sita, who perhaps suspected that all was not well, that his father and Queen Kaikeyi must have sent for him only to consult about something before his coronation. While driving in his chariot through the streets to the king's palace, Rama was greeted

on all sides by the people with joyous shouts and acclamations, and neither he nor they had the least inkling of what awaited him.

On entering Queen Kaikeyi's chamber in the zenana, Rama found his father seated with her, and he saluted them respectfully. The king faintly muttered his name, but could speak no further; and a glance at his face, which ever used to glow with pleasure on seeing him, was enough to appal Rama's heart. The king choked with grief and whimpered piteously; he turned his eyes away, or upon the ground, ashamed to look his son in the face. Seeing his father's helpless and sorrowful plight, the prince was bewildered and afraid, and turning to the queen, he saluted her again and addressed her thus: "I have never offended my father even unwittingly! Why is he then angry with me? Tell me that, I pray you, and pacify him. He was always glad to see me; why is he sad now and why does he not speak to me? Is he ailing in any way? Is there any reason for his grief? Are my beloved brothers, Bharata and Satrugna, and my queen mothers doing well? Or is there anything the matter with any of them? I am not aware of having done or said anything to anger or aggrieve him, and I cannot bear to live even a moment disobeying or displeasing him. Who would ever act against the wishes of a father to whom he owes his

very being? Or is it, O mother, that he is thus abashed and dismayed, at anything you said to him in wrath or pride? What is the reason? I know nothing, and never before have I seen the king thus. Tell me, truly, why he is so now."

"The king is not angry, Rama, or aggrieved," replied the queen coolly, "but there is something in his mind which he is afraid to tell you. Ever kind and loving, his tongue shrinks from speaking a loveless word to you now. He has made me a promise and you must fulfil it. Having granted me some boons and pledged his royal word, your father now frets himself with vain regret like a common man. The mighty Emperor of the world willingly granted my requests, and he now seeks to dam up the river after the floods are past. Truth is at the root of all duty as every one knows well. The king is now vexed with me because the course of Truth is against your good, and I ask you therefore to enable him not to forswear himself and be untrue to his own plighted troth. Whether the king's behest be to your good or to your evil, if you promise to obey it, I shall myself tell it to you, for the king will never say it himself."

"For shame, my mother, these are not words to be addressed to me," replied the Prince in his father's hearing and presence, and sore at heart

for her doubt of him, "If he bids me to leap into fire, or drink poison, or drown myself in the sea, I will obey at once. I know no law but his wishes, and he is always my *guru*, my father, my king, and my best friend. Therefore, O mother, let me know his wish and I will certainly fulfil it. I pledge my word of honour, and Rama never yet broke his promise."

Having thus snared the Prince in the same way as his father, and sure now of the success of her plot, Kaikeyi told Rama that the king had granted her two boons,—to crown Bharata as heir-apparent, and to send Rama into the forests that very day.

"If you are true to your word and wish to save your father from untruth," continued she, "do as I tell you. Obey your father's bidding. Go to Dhandakaranya and abide there like a hermit for fourteen years. Let Bharata be crowned in your stead. The king has granted me these boons, and is therefore sorely grieved now and unable even to look you in the face. Son of Dasaratha, do your father's bidding that he may not have to break his own word and sin against truth."

Dasaratha heard these words with greater pain than ever. But Rama was unmoved and replied readily. "Let Bharata be crowned, and I will go into the forests to-day and live there like a hermit, with matted hair, wearing deer-

skins and the bark of trees, even as the king has promised you. But why should not the king tell me to resign the crown to Bharata? Nothing is so dear to me in this life that I would not give it up at his bidding, nor anything so dreadful that I would not brave it to please him. Why should he weep then in this manner, or remain crest-fallen? Let messengers on fleet horses be sent this instant to fetch Bharata from his uncle's house. I shall leave for Dhandakaranya presently, after taking leave of my mother and comforting Sita. Console the king, I pray you, and see to it that Bharata returns home soon, to do his bidding and look after him." Saying these words, Rama went round the weeping monarch and his heartless queen, and after saluting their feet, left the chamber, followed by his faithful brother Lakshmana.



XIII. Mother and Brother.

ON quitting Kaikeyi's rooms, Rama walked towards his mother Kausalya's palace. He found her performing a *homa* by means of Brahmin priests, for his greater welfare. She was faint with fasting, and absorbed in prayer and penance, purely robed in white silk, to please the Gods and win their favour for her beloved son. When Rama saluted her feet, she blessed him in these kind and loving words "My child!

May you attain the long age, fame, and *dharma* of the many great *Rajarishis* of thy line Thy father is a most truthful king, and he will surely crown thee as his heir to-day Be seated, and eat something I pray thee, as the coronation ceremony may not be over till a late hour "

Women are generally more superstitious than men all over the world, and have more faith in forms and ceremonies But a loving mother is not a mere woman, she is, in fact, little less than divine For the sake of her child, she will weary her legs in endless peregrinations round a shrine, and reduce her frame to a skeleton by fasts and all sorts of other penances But she cannot bear to see that child walk in the sun, if she can help it, and she will not suffer him to fast for a few hours even on sacred and ceremonial occasions. Such is a mother's love I earnestly hope that you, my young reader, have had that blessing, and I envy you if you still enjoy it But to resume our story

Rama broke the news to her gently, but she fainted and fell to the ground on hearing it He tenderly took her up, and revived her, and tried to console her But the mother's heart was bleeding, and she wept and wailed bitterly and long "My child, would that you had never been born! I had then had only one regret, that of being childless But now, my heart must indeed be of stone, my body of steel,

that I am not yet dead. No, there is no place in the vast mansions of Death for such unfortunate beings as I am. The honour and happiness of a husband's love and regard were never mine. Though the senior queen, I never enjoyed the privileges and honours of that station. But when you were born, I forgot my vexations and cares in gazing on your face. I began to hope for better days, and all these seventeen years since your *Upanayana*, I have been longing to see you crowned as heir. And now, old and helpless as I am, I shall become the butt of the gibes and taunts of my young and scheming rivals. What greater misfortune than this can ever befall a woman? How can I bear even to see the face of the haughty Kaikeyi, or endure her insults? My husband has deemed me worse than a bond-slave; the very servants will neglect and disregard me, when her son Bharata mounts the throne. And you too will be away, you the sole hope and solace of all my sorrows. My fasts, penances and prayers have indeed all proved vain, and death alone must be my relief now. And you, my darling child, heir to an immemorial line of mighty and famous monarchs, how will you, born in purple and brought up in the lap of luxury, go into the haunts of wild beasts and live in the jungle, faring on roots and leaves and sleeping on the hard and thorny ground? I dread even to think of it."

"Why should he?" burst in Lakshmana passionately, who stood by his brother's side weeping silently, "He is the eldest son and rightful heir to the throne. What wrong has he done that he should forego that right and be exiled into the jungle? The king is in his dotage, and that wretched woman has bewitched him. He knows not indeed what he does, and no man in his senses who knows the *dharma shastras* will ever approve of this. Here I stand, a Kshattriya and a prince of this house, and this bow in my hand should indeed be no better than a spinster's distaff, if I fail in this most just and rightful cause. Come who may from the four corners of the world in defence of Bharata, and I shall meet them all, and my brother shall be crowned even this instant. People slight those who are quiet and boast not. Our elders cease to be our elders and lose our regard, when they act unjustly and prefer evil to good. It becomes our duty then to disobey them. On what ground, for what fault or crime of his, does the old king seek to disinherit my brother now? On what strength does he rely to uphold such a shameless act of injustice? Give me leave, my mother, do but keep quiet for a little while, I beseech you, my brother, and I shall set right everything and have the coronation at the appointed hour."

"Hear you what your faithful brother says?"

said queen Kausalya eagerly "Do so if it seems just in your eyes. It is not right that you should go into the jungle, abandoning me to the mercy of my proud rival. I will not allow it, and I shall die if you do so; the sin of my murder will be on your head. Take me too into the jungle with you if you are bent upon going."

These passionate, burning words of his brother and his mother pained Rama greatly, and he replied in an earnest, pleading tone "Mother, I cannot disobey my father. I lay my head at your feet and entreat you to give me leave. Many a great prince and *rishi* before this has earned deathless fame and *swarga* by implicit obedience to his father. My heart yearns to do likewise. It is my only duty and I must do it." Then he turned to his brother and said: "Lakshmana, dear brother of my heart, too well do I know your love for me and your matchless valour and might. It pains me deeply to see your great sorrow and that of my mother here. But the path of duty is clear, and I know it and I must follow it at all costs. There is no religion higher than Truth, and Truth is at the root of all Duty in this world. Do not add your grief to my mother's and pain me more. All that is best in life is threefold—*dharma*, worldly prosperity, and love. A chaste and loving wife who begets a good son, is able

to bless her husband with all these three, so also is Duty rightly done. I have no doubt whatever about this. What care I for my father's motive, whether it is good or otherwise? My sole duty is to obey him, as he is my father and my king, and nothing can make me swerve from it. He is my lord, your lord, Bharata's lord, and my mother's husband and lord. We are all therefore bound to obey him and that is our duty. While her righteous lord and husband is alive here, how can my mother go with me into the jungle, like a widow? Therefore, dear mother, I pray you, give me leave. It is not right that for the mere love of worldly goods, I disobey my father. Life is but a span, fame is eternal. I will not stray from the path of my duty, and barter lasting glory for the fleeting pomp and pleasure of a crown."

But Kausalya found no solace in these words, and her heart bled within her. She bewailed her sad lot, and bitterly blamed her son for being so hard. She was as much his *guru* and had as good a right to his obedience as his father. Nay more, a mother had indeed a greater claim on the child than the father. Life had no charms for her, nor even *swarga* without him. She pleaded piteously and refused to let him go. But Rama was unmoved and again besought his mother and his brother to bear up for a little while. Twice seven years, he said, was

but a little time and would fly away soon, and he would then come back home and they would all be happy. There was no ground, nor was it right to blame the king or Kaikeyi. It was all due to Fate, all-powerful relentless Fate, against which even the Gods were helpless. What could not be cured must be endured, and he therefore prayed them to take comfort in that thought for a few short years and grant him leave to do his duty.

But brave Lakshmana could not bear to hear such talk, and he interposed angrily: "It ill befits a Kshattriya and a warrior who is in his right senses, O my brother, to exalt Fate above everything. Fate is a poor weakling which cannot withstand man's strong will and earnest endeavour even for a moment. Only the craven and the sneak bemoan their fate and seek to justify their impotence in this manner. The valiant only mock at Fate and overcome it by their firm will and indomitable energy. This bow and this sword shall now decide the fate of this all-powerful Fate. Give me leave but for an hour, and I will upset all the iniquitous plans of the infatuated king and his wicked queen, and have you crowned."

Lakshmana's eyes streamed with tears, and he choked with grief and indignation. Prince Rama embraced him fondly, wiped his tears, and comforted him. But he was firm, and said

again gently "My heart yearns to do my father's bidding, and I cannot fail in that sacred duty. It was but yesterday that he offered me a crown and I gladly accepted it. I would it become me now to shrink back and refuse to do his bidding, because it is an unpleasant one. Surely this is not the right way of discharging one's duty. I will and I must obey his bidding as readily and willingly now, and I implore you both by the love you bear me, to give me leave."

Queen Kausalya saw clearly that his will was firm and that it was in vain to plead with him any further. So she gave him leave to go, but begged him to take her too with him, as she could not bear to live there after he was gone. Rama gently pointed out that as long as his father was alive, her place was by his side and nowhere else, and he appealed to her *dharma* as a *pathivatha*. He reminded her that his brother Bharata was a good and righteous prince who would never treat her ill, or allow others to do so. Her sense of duty to her husband, and the feeling that all her happiness in life was bound up with his, were soon aroused in her, and she at last agreed. She wiped her tears, controlled her grief with a great effort, and after purifying herself with *achamana*, gave him leave to go, and blessed him with an aching and heavy heart, but an apparently serene and cheerful countenance. "Go my son, since I cannot

make thee stay, go and return in safety. My grief will cease only after thy return. The ways of God are inscrutable in this world; for see, I, thy mother, now give thee leave to go into exile! And will that time ever come when I shall see thee come back from the forests, with matted hair and clad in the bark of trees? O, how my fond heart yearns that it were come even now! Yes, my dear child, I shall see thee again crowned and rule this kingdom. The great fame of having done thy duty will then be trumpeted about by glad and admiring millions, and will shed a halo of everlasting glory round thy brows. Thy name will be handed down to all the generations to-be in this Aryavārtha as that of the noble hero who cheerfully gave up his rightful empire and wandered into exile for many years to save his father from an untruth; and be uttered with reverence and love by countless millions of unborn lips. May the Devas guard and help thee in thy journey! May the great Lord of the Universe and the other gods and goddesses whom I have always worshipped and sought to please, shield thee from all harm! And may thou soon return, safe and well, to gladden my poor, aching heart and the heart of my loving daughter Sita!"

With tearful eyes and faltering speech, the queen embraced her son, again and again, and blessed him. Rama was greatly moved, and he

saluted his mother's feet many times He then wended his way towards his own palace, followed by his faithful brother.



XIV. Husband and Wife.

A GREAT English poet, Robert Browning, whose works, I hope, not one of my young readers will fail to read when he or she grows older, has gratefully thanked God that even

“ * * * the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides—one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her ”

And the good prince, who had so bravely faced the sudden fall from the height of wordly power and luxury to the lowest depth of obscurity and privation, now approached the woman he loved with down-cast eyes and a heavy heart. If ever he took delight in the crown, it was for her sake, and because she would become a queen then. Who was more fitted for it than she? And now, how could he break the dreadful news to her? O the misery of it! This was the very sting of the whole thing. The prince loved his beautiful wife very deeply, and he therefore felt the blow all the more keenly for her sake But he little knew the depth and force of a woman's true love, and he was soon to learn how while “love is of man's

life a thing apart, 'tis woman's whole existence," and how this would ward off the blow from her altogether

Sita, who was as innocent of all guile and evil as she was lovely, was awaiting her dear lord's return with joy and expectation in her heart. He would soon come back to her, his head purified with holy waters and crowned with the diadem of empire, seated on a magnificent chariot drawn by four richly caparisoned milk-white steeds, shaded by the royal umbrella, with *chamaras* waving on either side, and escorted by stately elephants and other paraphernalia of royalty. Pealing trumpets and high-sounding drums would announce his approach from afar, his praises would be sung by hundreds of bards and minstrels. And his happy face would glow anew with joy and pride on seeing her, and she would embrace him, her dear husband and king, so lovingly. Such was her fond dream as she sat in her chamber awaiting his coming. One of her maids entered in haste presently and informed her that the Prince was coming, alone and on foot. Sita rose and hurried to meet him. She saw him coming slowly, his eyes on the ground, his faithful brother Lakshmana following at a distance with 'face black as a thunder-cloud'. Grief overcame the Prince on seeing her, and some burning tears trickled down his cheeks. With her heart full of a vague fear and

anxiety, she asked, her own eyes brimming with tears.

"Why do you grieve so, my dear husband, when you ought to be joyful? And why have you not been crowned? Tell me what has happened. My heart bleeds to see you thus. Tell me, I pray you."

"Sita," said Rama almost choking with tears,

"My king and father has exiled me to the forests. My brother Bharata will be crowned in my stead. Dear Janaki, thou noble daughter of a royal house famed for its righteousness and virtue, thou well knowest the path of true *dharma*, and I shall tell thee how this has come about. Years ago, my father had promised two boons to Queen Kaikeyi, and she now led him to pledge his word to redeem his promise without first naming the boons. The king pledged his word, and then she has asked for Bharata's coronation and my exile for fourteen years. I have therefore come to take leave of thee. Take heart, my love, and live here in prayer and penance during my absence. Displease not Bharata with vain regrets or unkind words, and remember he is the king now. My mother is old and sorely stricken with sorrow at my banishment. Comfort and cherish her, I pray thee, and consider *that* thy highest duty now. Do thou remain here, leading a pious life of reverence and service to my parents and kind-

ness to my brothers, and give me leave to depart ”

He ceased, and there was a pause as she waited to hear if he had anything more to say. Her eyes flashed forth grief and ire and she exclaimed. “Son of a great king! How speak you so firmly and yet so lightly? Know you not, my lord, that father, mother, brother, son, daughter, all these enjoy the fruits of their good or evil deeds, each by himself or herself, while a wife alone shares in her husband’s *punya* and *papa*, his weal and woe? The king has therefore exiled me too, your true and loyal wife, in exiling you. Her husband is her sole prop and refuge to a wife in this world as well as in the next. My duty therefore is to walk before you, smoothing the hard and thorny jungle for your feet. Think not that I shall encumber or vex you in any way in your long and toilsome exile. I have done no fault or sin that you should thus seek to abandon me. My parents have taught me well my duties as a wife. There is nothing for me to learn about it now. By your side, the fearful jungle will be to me as homely and pleasant as my father’s house, while without you, even heaven would be no better than hell. I long to behold the endless beauties of primeval nature, the lofty green-clad hills, the sacred rivers and streams, the cool and fragrant

groves with their myriads of bright-winged songsters, the thickly wooded valleys, and the *asramas* of holy *rishis*, in your company. An old seer once foretold in my girlhood that I would spend a part of my life in the lovely forests. I have often thought of it since and longed for that day. How can I ever see the lovely forests better or more safely than with you? With you by my side, and wandering pleasantly over hill and dale, even a hundred years would soon pass off as a day. I will and I must go with you. Duty and pleasure alike require it, and I pray you, my dear husband, leave off all doubt and fear, and take me with you. Be assured you shall never rue it."

Rama seemed loath to yield, and he set before her vividly the dangers and hardships of a forest-life and besought her to stay at home. He had thought over the matter well and carefully, her delicate up-bringing, the hard and fearful life of an exile in the jungle, and for her own good, he had concluded that it would be best for her to remain behind. Her going with him would only bring upon her needless pain and distress him very much. He therefore bade her to give in to his decision in the matter. No sooner had he said this than Sita retorted, with a pretty pout and with tears in her eyes. "I am then, the only source of trouble to my lord now, and without me, all

will be unmixed joy ?" and she wept bitterly. His losing the crown and his long exile to the jungle did not grieve her at all ; but the cruel words, " I go ; live you happy here," pained her most. She again pointed out that she was his lifemate for good and for evil, that she had a right to share in his exile, that her duty was always by his side. And she declared firmly and finally that she would kill herself if he left her behind, and earnestly entreated him to take her. He now saw the depth of her love and her determination to brave anything rather than part from him, and he yielded. He praised her warmly, said that he had meant only to test her strength of mind, and declared that her conduct well befitted her royal house and parentage, and his own

Lakshmana then begged for leave to accompany them, shrewdly pointing out how useful he would be to them in the forests. Rama agreed at last to take him too. The three then gave away all their riches and goods, their horses, elephants and herds of cattle, their chariots and palanquins, their priceless silks and jewels, everything they had, in fact, except their arms, including even their mansions, to their friends and dependants, to holy Brahmans and other worthy persons, and thus got ready for the long exile. When this was over, they went to the king's palace to

take their last leave of him and the queen-mothers



XV. The Exiles Depart.

TAKING their arms only with them, the two brothers and Sita walked towards the king's palace, through the crowded streets. They found the people in a state of indignation and grief at the king's unjust and cruel act, and heard them lamenting on all sides. But none of the three, nor any one in those vast crowds, seems to have ever thought of the beautiful princess Urmila, brave Lakshmana's wife. I cannot help thinking of her sad and pitiable lot. She, no doubt, loved her heroic husband dearly and was loved by him, and tradition says that she was in a kind of swoon through all the fourteen years, so great was her grief. On reaching the palace, Rama asked Sumantia to announce them to the King. The King, on hearing of it, ordered all the ladies of the zenana to attend at once, and then sent for his son. When Rama entered the chamber with his wife and faithful brother, he saw his father sitting, a very picture of grief and despair, surrounded by his three queens, and all his other wives. On seeing his son, Dasaratha left his seat and ran forward to meet him, but he fainted and fell to the ground on the way. Rama and his two companions ran

up and raised the king and placed him on a cot. The women wailed aloud

When the King came to himself again, Rama saluted him respectfully and begged leave in these words. "Lord of this empire and my king and father, I have come to take leave of you to go into the forests. Bless us, I pray you. Let Lakshmana and Sita also go with me. I have dissuaded them in many ways, but they wish it still. Give us leave, my father, nor vainly vex your heart with grief."

The King replied. "Raghava! I was deceived by Kaikeyi in those boons. Let not my word therefore bind thee, and do thou crown thyself king of Ayodhya."

"You have righteously ruled this land for many years," rejoined Rama, "and I will not make you false now. I shall sport in the forests for fourteen years and return gladly to salute your feet. Give us leave now, I pray you."

Dasaratha then begged his son to stay that night at least and start on the morrow. But the Prince said that he was quite ready, that he had promised Kaikeyi to go away that very day, that he yearned to establish his father's perfect truthfulness, that the jungle had no fear for him and that he wished to go at once. Sumantra the good minister, thereupon addressed himself to Queen Kaikeyi and begged her to relent. We learn from his words that Kaikeyi

was the worthy daughter of a wicked and self-willed woman, who was put away by her royal husband because she insisted on his telling her a secret which would cost him his life. The minister quoted the saying, 'a son like his father and a daughter like her mother,' as old even then. The sage Siddhartha spoke to her likewise; but it was in vain. She was unmoved, and objected even to the king's order to send a large and princely retinue with Rama into the forests, as against the spirit of exile. The King, in disgust, said that he too would go to the forests with his son, but nothing daunted or moved her. She brought to the exiles, the hermit's garments made of the bark of trees which she had got ready. Rama and Lakshmana put them on, but the poor princess did not know what to do with such a rough and coarse garb, and turned to her husband with tears in her eyes. Rama took it from her and tied it over her silk dress with his own hands, amidst the loud lamentations of the women. The great sage Vasishtha could not bear to see this, and tried to persuade Kaikeyi and upbraided her, but with no better success than the rest. The old King writhed in agony to see all this.

The Prince then begged his father to be specially kind to his mother, Queen Kausalya. She was old and had already suffered much. She never spoke ill of the King and was so

good and uncomplaining. His exile had now plunged her in grief, and he besought the king to cherish her lovingly

But the King was so overcome by woe, that he could not reply or even see his son's face. In anguish and remorse, he wailed to himself: "I am the worst of sinners. I must have separated the tender calves from their mother-cows in my former birth. I must have tortured many living beings. Therefore is it that I have to suffer now in this manner. Death will not overtake me till my allotted days are over, for do I not still live? I see my son stand before me clad in bark like a hermit! How soon has this cruel Kaikeyi caused so much suffering to so many people! Rama,—” but he fainted again, unable to speak further.

When he revived, the King ordered Sumantra to get the chariot ready for the exiles, and he also bade his treasurer to bring forth enough of silk cloths and precious jewels to last Sita for fourteen years. This was done, and the princess adorned herself with the jewels, and shone with the radiance of the rising sun.

Queen Kausalya then embraced her daughter and addressed her in these words. "It is the nature of some women, my daughter, to slight their loving husbands in adversity. Such are scorned by the world as wicked. False and

fickle women, those who are indifferent, immoral, and of evil mind, first enjoy the sweets of love with their lords, and blame and forsake them when they are in trouble. Their minds are indeed ever restless, and nothing dear, good, or holy, has a hold on them. But to the true and honourable wife, her husband is above everything. Therefore I charge thee, my dear daughter, do not slight Rama who is now an exile. Thy husband is thy God, be he rich or poor."

Sita bowed reverentially and replied: "I shall do your bidding. I know my duty as a wife, and you have also instructed me now. Count me not with bad women. I will be as constant to righteousness as the light is to the sun. A wife without her husband, even though she may have a hundred sons, is no better than a string-less harp, or a wheel-less chariot, and she can never be wholly happy. What her father, her mother and her sons give her will be necessarily limited. Which wife will not then gladly worship her husband, who alone contributes to her happiness without end and without bounds? Noble mother! How shall I, then, a true and duteous wife, ever slight my lord?" And Kausalya wept in mingled joy and sorrow to hear these words. Rama then saluted his mother and prayed her not to vex the King's mind in any way on account of her

own great sorrow, and to think that the fourteen years would soon be over. He then took leave of all the other wives of his father, and begged them to forgive him if he had ever offended any of them in ignorance. They all wailed aloud, and the palace, which had always resounded with music and other joyous acclamations, was now filled with their cries and groans.

The King was in a swoon and the three eunuchs went round him and saluted him with heavy hearts. Rama and his wife again saluted Kausalya. Lakshmana too saluted her, and then his mother Sumitra. She embraced him, weeping, and blessed him. She reminded him that service and obedience to others, self-sacrifice, holy penances, and death on the field of battle, were, from olden time, the glory of his race; and she advised him to look upon Rama as his father Dasaratha, on Sita as herself, and on the jungle as Ayodhya.

Sumantra then told them that the chariot was ready. A basket covered with hide and a spade had already been brought and placed in the chariot as also their arms and Sita's clothing for the jungle. Sita was the first to mount the chariot, and she did so with a light step and a buoyant heart. The two princes then mounted, and Rama seated himself by her side, and Lakshmana behind them. The chariot was driven away by

lonely gloom. Sumantra told the King how the exiles had sent their loving regard to him and to the queen-mothers, and how prince Rama earnestly begged him again and again to console his old father. On hearing this, the King was quite overcome by the agony of shame and remorse.

"Why do you remain mute and reply not to your son's message?" exclaimed Kausalya in the bitterness of her heart. "Having done this injustice, why are you ashamed now? Arise, O King, and grieve not. May all happiness befall you! She you fear to speak about Rama, Kaikeyi, is not here now. You may speak freely."

And there was again great grief and lamentation in the palace as when the exiles went away. After a while, the King asked Sumantra to tell him everything about the journey in detail, sadly bewailing the fate of his beloved sons and daughter who had now to rest under trees, eat roots and berries, and dwell in the jungle with wild beasts and venomous reptiles. "On quitting the city," replied Sumantra, "we were followed by large crowds of the prince's friends and the grieving people, who begged him to return or take them too with him. We reached the river Tamas by dusk, and the prince slept on a bed of leaves we made for him on its bank, taking nothing but a draught of water

for the night. He often spoke of Your Majesty and the queen-mothers, and said that he felt no anxiety because Bharata was a good prince. As the citizens were unyielding and would not return to their homes, the prince, to save them needless pain and trouble, resumed the journey very early in the morning, while they were all yet asleep, and also asked me to take back the chariot for some miles and return by another way, so as to mislead them. We thus got away from them and they went back. We then drove fast through fertile fields and rich villages, whose inhabitants came out to honour the prince and lament his exile, and we reached the sacred Ganges at the southern outskirts of Kosala. We were met there by Guha, the hunter-chieftain, who welcomed us hospitably. The prince was greatly touched and pleased by the hunter's loving kindness and devotion, but accepted only of the grass for the horses, as the rest of the presents were of no use to a hermit like him. We halted under an *inguna* tree that night on the bank of the Ganges. The next morning, the prince bade me return, and they crossed the Ganges in the boat brought by Guha. I pressed him again and again to come home with me, but in vain. I could not make up my mind to leave them and so asked to go with them into the forests. This too he refused, and bade me return at once to assure his step-mother

Kaikeyi of his exile and thus wipe off any doubt she might yet have in her mind of Your Majesty's truthfulness Guha begged the prince to abide with him But Rama replied that an exile should lead a hermit's life, with matted hair, eating only fruits, roots and such produce of the forests, and sleeping on the ground. He could not therefore dwell in peopled hamlets, but only in an *asrama* He asked Guha to fetch the gummy juice of the banyan tree, and it was the misfortune of these aged eyes of mine to behold the noble princes mat their hair into *jatas* with it, like hermits Then they crossed the river and the princess worshipped the holy *Gangadevi* On reaching the southern bank, they walked away into the forests "

" But did Rama say nothing more at parting, than what you have told me already ? " asked the King

" Yes," replied Sumantra, " he bade me request his mother to reverence Your Majesty as her god, to be kind and courteous to the other queen-mothers, and to look upon Bharata as her own son He bade me tell him to show equal respect to all the queens, to guard and cherish his subjects, and to obey Your Majesty in every thing With tearful eyes, the prince again asked me to request Bharata to treat his loving mother like his own mother Kaikeyi "

" Did Lakshmana say nothing ? "

"That prince, in a voice choking with rage and grief, declared that the exile of his brother Rama was wholly unjust, as he had done no fault at all, and that his father was greatly to blame for it. He said that it was not possible for the people to love, or have any regard for such a king, and that he himself did not recognise a father in him. Rama alone was now his brother, king, father and kindred." The old monarch bowed his head humbly and in shame to this judgment of his younger son. He then asked whether Sita had sent no message. "She was overcome with grief and the great calamity that had suddenly overtaken her," replied Sumantra, "unused to trouble and sorrow, she looked like one dazed or possessed. She looked at me returning home, and at her husband ready to enter the jungle, and wept bitter tears. She could not speak for grief, and said nothing."

There was a fresh outburst of grief and tears on hearing this account. After a while, the King asked, "But did you come away at once, Sumantra? Know you nothing more of whither they went and where they are now?"

"I remained with Guha until the guides he sent with them, came back and learnt the following from them. Lakshmana always walked in front, Rama behind, and the princess between them. They reached the Vatsa country

that evening, and spent the night under a banyan tree in the jungle. They reached holy Prayag (Allahabad), where the Jumna meets the Ganges, next evening, and were entertained by the sage Bharadwaja, whose *asrama* is near the spot. The next day they took leave of the sage, and as advised by him, they wended their way towards the sacred and pleasanthill, Chitrakuta, crossing the Jumna on a raft made by Lakshmana. They met the sage Valmiki at Chitrakuta, and they now live in an *asrama* built on its pleasant slope by Lakshmana, with branches of trees, creepers, and leaves."

Sumantra ended the tale with letting the King know a piece of his own mind,—how unjust and unkingly he deemed the act of folly which doomed his rightful heir and dearly beloved son, with his gentle wife and faithful brother, to a hard, ascetic life in the wild jungle



XVII. The Fatal Curse. (पद)

BUT the good minister, who had upbaided his old and beloved master, carried away by his just indignation, soon found it necessary to solace him and Kausalya, both of whom wished him to take them to Rama. So keen and bitter was the Queen's grief, that she again forgot her duty, and blamed the King in words that probed the wound in his heart. "Famed all the world

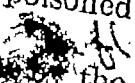
over as a just, generous and merciful monarch, my lord has now done a most shameful thing indeed! How can the noble princes and the frail and tender Sita bear the heat and cold of the jungle, walk on the hard and thorny ground up hill and down dale for miles and miles, or live on leaves, berries and fruits even for a day? What has my innocent child, who loved his father only too well, and was so sincerely beloved of all, ever done to meet with such a cruel fate? And I yet live here, and even Death is afraid to come near such a hard-hearted wretch! My noble son, even if he ever comes back alive from his long, long exile, will not deign to accept the crown which his brother had been wearing. Her husband is a woman's first refuge in this world, then her son, and then her kindred. She has no other help besides. You, my first refuge, have forsaken me, my son has left me, and my kindred are far away. Having a husband, I did not follow my son into the forests. I have thus been ruined by you in every way, and am the most miserable and unfortunate of women. This vast empire has been ruined by you, you have plunged in grief your ministers and the people, and you yourself are well-nigh stricken dead with sorrow. Kaikeyi and her son are alone happy. O what have you done! My heart bleeds to think of it and I long so to die."

Trembling with grief and shame, the old King sought his wife's forgiveness, with joined palms as towards a superior "Kausalya, have pity on me See, I bow before thee humbly Kind as thou ever art even to thy foes, forget not thy duty to thy husband, be he good or bad. Though sunk in grief, it befits thee not to speak such cruel words to me, who am also suffering so much for my folly"

This piteous pleading of her lord melted the Queen's heart With streaming eyes she took hold of his hands, placed them reverentially on her head, and earnestly begged his forgiveness "I pray you, my lord, forgive me. I place my head at your feet and beseech you. I know my duty and your truthfulness I have thoughtlessly spoken thus, through my great grief at parting from my son Grief indeed saps all courage, confounds the understanding, and ruins everything It is the worst of foes, and a sudden burst of grief is harder to bear than a blow Even self-controlled ascetics are sometimes overcome by it This is the fifth night of Rama's exile, but these five nights have been more weary to me than as many years"

The King was appeased, and the old couple wept together and solaced each other The king said to her "We reap what we sow in this world, and the fruits of a man's deeds are good or evil according to their nature Who does

anything therefore, without thinking of the fruits of his action, is a little man. The man, who charmed by the beauty of the *palasa* flower, cuts down the mango trees to make more room for the *palasa* tree, will grieve sorely when its fruits appear. I have cut down the mango, and nursed the *palasa* in my folly. Having banished Rama I now grieve." The King heaved a doleful sigh, and said again after a while. "Hear this tale, my queen, and then you will understand how I now suffer for an evil and thoughtless deed of my early days, done even before I wedded thee. I was fond of hunting then, and famed for my skill. I could aim at an animal from sounds, and without even seeing it. One day, while I was out hunting in the forests, I heard a gurgling noise near a stream, and thought it was caused by an elephant drinking water. Proud of my skill, and without caring to see and make sure of it, I aimed a fatal arrow towards the spot. Then I heard a human shriek and words uttered in deadly pain. I rushed forward and found that I had mortally wounded a young hermit, who had come to the stream for water and whose pitcher had made the gurgling sound. He blamed me bitterly. he had done me no harm, and yet I had killed him, I who was a king and whose duty was to shield and guard every one. His parents were very old and utterly blind and he was their sole prop

and help. They would die of thirst and hunger while he would expire by the side of the stream. My queen, you may easily imagine how my heart was filled with shame, remorse and fear then. But the hermit soon expired, begging me with his dying breath to take some water to his old and blind parents and tell them of his sad fate. I took the pitcher of water and went to the hermitage with a heavy heart. I tremble even now to think of the grief of the old couple when they learnt the truth. They were quite blind and feeble and unable even to walk. The hermit then foretold that I too would die of grief in my old age at the loss of a dear son, and then they soon died of their grief before my very eyes. Long after, in the sad childless years of my life, I sometimes thought of it, and took solace that a son would be born to me anyhow. But in these later happy days after the birth of our children, I forgot it quite. My thoughtless deed has now borne fruit, and I have to eat that fruit, however bitter it be. I too must die now of grief at the loss of my dear son Rama. Cruel Kaikeyi has cloven my heart in twain with that poisoned shaft, and my life will soon ebb away."  the Wailing in this manner, and overcome by the remembrance of what he considered was a fatal curse and a just retribution, King Dasaratha expired that night, calling on Rama's name and bitterly blaming Kaikeyi with his dying breath.

XVIII. The Return of Bharata.

THE death of the old monarch, coming so close on the beloved prince's exile, aggrieved all still more, and there was long and loud lamentation in the city and in the palace. Queen Kaikeyi was blamed as the root of the double misfortune, and became the butt of everybody's reproach. But she had a secret source of joy in her heart and was eagerly awaiting her son's return. His joy and gratitude would be her ample reward, and not one of her fault-finders would dare to speak a word when *he* was crowned and became king. And she impatiently looked forward to that happy day.

The King's body was embalmed and placed in scented oil, and messengers on fleet horses were despatched to fetch Bharata from his uncle's country to perform the King's funeral and mount the throne. We are told that Bharata had a bad dream foreshadowing what was coming, and the reader will remember that this is the second time that such a dream is referred to. The messengers took costly presents to Bharata, his uncle, and his grandfather, but their orders were to fetch the prince at once and not to tell him of what had happened at Ayodhya. Bharata and Satrughna took leave of their grandfather, uncle and other kinsmen and left their city, Rajagraha, for Ayodhya. Many

towns, villages and rivers are mentioned on Bharata's route, but they have not been well identified now. On reaching the verge of the Kosala country, the princes left their followers behind to come at leisure, and themselves hurried towards Ayodhya in a chariot drawn by very fleet horses. Bharata reached Ayodhya on the eighth day after quitting Rajagraha, and the sad and forlorn state of the city foreboded no good. He hastily went into his father's palace, but found him not there. He then went to his mother's palace and on seeing her, saluted her, Kaikeyi embraced her son with a glad heart and asked him about the welfare of her father and her brother, and whether he had been in good health all along and found his journey pleasant. He replied that all were well and eagerly asked why the King, who used often to be in her palace, was not there, and whether he was with Kausalya. Kaikeyi replied that the great and good king, his father, had gone the way of all flesh and was no more. Prince Bharata was sorely affected, and fell to the ground wailing aloud. His mother consoled him with difficulty, and the prince then asked what his father had said in his last moments. He also wished to see at once his elder brother Rama, who was now as a father to him. Untruthfulness was not among Kaikeyi's faults and she replied :

"The King died calling on Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, with his last breath. He said that they alone could be thought happy who would witness their return."

"Why, where have they gone?" asked Bharata in surprise.

"My son," replied the queen, "Rama, wearing the hermit's garb, has gone into Dhandakaranya with Sita and Lakshmana."

"Did Rama covet and seize any man's property, or wife, or unjustly torture any one? Why was my good brother so banished?"

Kaikeyi was glad that the time had come at last for her reward, for her son to see and gratefully rejoice how dearly she loved him. She replied with pride and joy. "My dear son, your brother Rama did not do any such thing. But I, out of the great love I bear you and hearing of the King's intention to crown him, asked for his exile and you being crowned instead. Bound by his promise, the King yielded and so Rama has gone into the jungle. The old King died of grief. The kingdom is yours now. Grieve not, my son, but perform your father's funeral, and then have yourself crowned by Vasishta and the rest. I have done all this only for your sake."

The reproaches and taunts which Kaikeyi had hitherto borne at the hands of the King, the other

queens, the ministers and priests, and the people, were as nothing to the burning words of scorn and rage which her son now heaped upon her head. He accused her of murdering her king and husband and exiling his blameless brother most cruelly. He said he was quite ashamed to have been born of such a mother and that he must have committed some heinous sin to have come by such a fate. He told her to esteem him as dead to her for evermore; that he did not even to look upon her; that no hell could be so fearful enough for her. His bitterest foe could not have smitten him in worse way, or brought upon him more infamy. He swore that he would never accept the crown, and that he would at once fetch Rama from the jungle to perform his father's funeral and rule the kingdom. For her, death was the only solace left, and she might drown, hang, or kill herself in some other way. When he was thus railing and fuming against his mother, Queen Kausalya came to him, and at first spoke to him in cruel reproaches of Rama's banishment and his mounting throne. But Bharata affirmed his innocence on the most dreadful oaths, and she was soon convinced. She then embraced him lovingly and blessed him.

The sage Vasishtha then came and under his guidance, Bharata performed his father's funeral with Satrugna. Great was the grief of the

two brothers on the loss of their father and the exile of their other brothers and Sita, and Vasishtha and Kausalya had to console them often. The resentment of Lakshmana's brother, Satrugna, against Kaikeyi, and especially against her hump-backed maid Manthara, was so keen that Bharata had to interfere and appease him. The *sanchayana* ceremony was done on the thirteenth day.

On the next day, the subject, princes and people met together and prayed Bharata to assume the crown, but he was firm. The kingdom belonged only to the eldest son, and he therefore told them to get ready soon to go with him into the jungle to bring back Rama home. And they all praised and blessed the noble and high-souled prince. Sage Vasishtha also pleaded with him to mount the throne and rule the kingdom which his father and his elder brother had given him. But with tears in his eyes, Bharata declared that he himself and the kingdom were alike Rama's by right and that it ill became a learned sage like him to tempt him from the path of duty and righteousness. He vowed again that he would fetch Rama to rule the land or dwell with him in the jungle with Lakshmana, and orders were issued at once for the journey into the forests, in search of the rightful King Rama, to begin on the next day.



XIX. The Headman of the Hunters.

A large tract of jungle, near the southern border of the Kosala kingdom, and lying on either side of the holy Ganges, was occupied by certain hill-tribes, who lived mainly by hunting, and also by ferrying stray passengers across the river. Guha was their headman, or king. He had been very friendly and helpful to Rama, and that prince, with his sweet kindly speech and winning manners, had made himself the idol of the simple and brave hunter's heart. Such rude tribes are generally rapacious and cruel. But when they love a man in their own crude way, or pledge their word, they are faithful to the last, and readily lay down their lives, if necessary. When Guha saw a vast army coming towards the Ganges, with thousands of elephants, horses, chariots and palanquins, and a huge cloud of dust rising high above the trees, his suspicion was aroused, and he feared that some further mischief was afoot against his friend Rama. He had heard of the reasons for Rama's exile only from the mouth of the brave and wrathful Lakshmana, when he stood all night, bow in hand, watching from a distance the tree under which his brother and the princess slept. And Lakshmana, in the bitterness of his heart, would certainly not have taken the trouble to acquit Kaikeyi's son of all

blame in the matter. In fact, you will see later on, that Lakshmana himself doubts Bharata just as Guha did now. The hunter-chieftain thought that Bharata, not content with seizing the crown and driving Rama into exile, was now pursuing him into the forests, and his heart swelled with rage at this further piece of injustice. He bade his followers to arm themselves and be ready for an onset on the southern bank of the river, while he himself crossed over in a boat to the northern bank to meet the prince and find out the truth of the matter. Prince Rama, son of a mighty monarch, had called him 'friend' and spoken such kind words to him. What would he not then risk in his cause.

Sumantra introduced Guha to Bharata, and a look at the crownless head and grief-stricken face of the prince was enough to allay half the doubts of the hunter. After the first greetings, Bharata asked Guha for help to cross the river and for guides to show him the way to Bharadwaja's hermitage.

"I have hundreds of boats ready at hand," replied Guha, "and shall myself accompany and guide you with my men. But tell me first, I pray you, mean you and this vast army, good or evil to my friend Rama?"

Bharata assured him of his true intent and removed his suspicion. Guha then praised him

warmly for refusing a crown and empire which had come to him all unsought, and declared that his name and fame would shine for ever in this world for such an act of peerless self-sacrifice in the cause of right and justice. Guha then told the prince all that happened during the short stay of the exiles there, and praised heartily Lakshmana's faithfulness and watchful care. He also showed him the *inguna* tree under which Rama and Sita had slept, as well as the bed of grass which Lakshmana had made for them. Bharata could not contain his tears on seeing this, and he showed the spot to the queens, wailing bitterly. So great was his sense of right, and so grieved was he at the hardships and sufferings which his brother Rama had to endure on his account, that he then took a vow to lead a hermit's life, with matted hair, wearing the bark of trees, eating only roots and berries and sleeping on the ground, until Rama returned home.

Boats and rafts were brought in countless numbers by Guha and his men the next morning, and the army crossed over amidst great noise and confusion. The elephants and some skilled men swam the river, some others not so well skilled in swimming, crossed over with the help of pots, but the bulk of the army, and the horses, cattle and the royal equipage were taken over in large country crafts with huge masts

and sails A large and stately ship, *Swastika*, sailing gracefully with gay banners waving, and tiny bells tinkling sweetly all around, was brought for the royal party. White woollen carpets were spread inside this vessel, and the princes, the queen-mothers, and some others crossed over in her We also read of a curious custom: when the royal party moved on, the place of its former encampment was burnt by some of the camp-followers lest *Rajalakshmi* should remain behind Guha and his men acted as guides On reaching Prayag, Bharata left the army in encampment and went to Bharadwaja's hermitage with a chosen few, to see that sage. The sage welcomed them, and though he too doubted at first the prince's motive in following his exiled brother Rama, he was indeed pleased to hear Bharata's reply and praised him highly So pleased indeed was the great sage that he insisted on feasting the royal party and the vast army, and right grandly did he do it by the force of his *tapas*

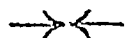
Prince Bharata enquired of the sage the way to Chitrakuta, and was about to depart, when the queen-mothers came in to pay their respects to the holy man Kausalya and Sumitra humbly bowed their heads to his holy feet. Kaikeyi too did so, blushing, and then went and stood by the side of her son Bharata. "Prince of Raghu's race!" said the sage,

"I wish to know your mother, which of these is she."

"Lord" replied Bharata respectfully, "of lowly mien and worn out with sorrow and fasting, this lady who looks like *dharma dherata*, is my father's senior queen, by name Kausalya. She is the mother of Rama, that lion among men. That lady, who stands holding Kausalya's left hand, and looks so care-worn and like a faded flower, is Sumitra. Who that sees Rama now will believe that he had any brothers, but for Lakshmana? She gave birth to that faithful hero and Satrugna here. And she who cruelly banished the two heroes, Rama and Lakshmana, and the saintly Sita to the wild jungle, and brought about the death of her own husband, King Dasaratha, who is greedy, proud, irritable, obstinate and vain of her own beauty beyond all measure, who knows no pity and fears no sin or shame, who was the only joyous person in all Ayodha when I returned home on my father's death, this heartless and wicked woman, Kaikeyi, is my mother."

The sage Bharadwaja soothed the prince gently in these words. "Blame not your mother, Bharata, or speak of her so unkindly. For who knows the will of gods, and that this apparent evil will not be the cause of much good in the end?" The party then took leave of the sage and wended their way towards Chitrakuta.

It is curious that while the Aryan poet Valmiki describes this scene of the introduction of the Queen-mothers by Bharata as taking place later in Bharadwaja's hermitage, the Tamil poet, Kamban, times it earlier on board the vessel, while the party cross the Ganges, and says that the prince thus introduced the queens to the hunter-chieftain Guha. Kamban is said to have composed his deathless verses after hearing Valmiki's Sanskrit poem read and explained to him daily. Was it then a mere mistake due to chance or slip of memory, or did he knowingly change the story, as he has undoubtedly done in some other places?



XX. The Meeting of the Brothers.

RAMA was living happily at Chitrakuta with his wife and his faithful brother. There was no palace now, no soft-cushioned ease or luxury, no army of servants vying with each other to please their lord. He, or his brother, killed game for their food and Sita cooked it. They ate also of the wholesome and sweet fruits that were to be had in plenty. They bathed in the river Mandhagini and drank of its clear, sweet water. They wandered about among the pleasant hills and dales and rested their limbs when tired, under the shade of the trees, enjoying the refreshing fragrance of the flowers and the sweet

singing of the birds Lakshmana was ever eager and on the watch to add to the comforts and simple pleasures of their forest home Rama and Sita delighted to roam about the forest, noting and admiring the endless and ever-varying beauties of nature, and the prince often declared that he could gladly pass not fourteen merely, but fourteen hundred years, if need be, in such a life As for Sita, her happiness knew no bounds The brave Lakshmana, one of those rare and beautiful natures, born and living solely for the happiness of others, was quite content and happy in serving his beloved brother and his wife So they were all quite happy, although, no doubt, they often thought of their home and the dear ones pining there for their absence. Some people foolishly think that there can be no happiness without riches or power Beyond the bare needs of the body, happiness is truly a matter of the mind, and it is more often found in the humble cottage of toil and contentment than in the palaces of plenty and power, and the mansions of ignoble ease. Rama and Sita were one day taking their food by the side of a stream, as they often did, when they heard a great uproar and saw a cloud of dust at a distance. Rama bade his brother climb up a tree and see what it was Lakshmana did so, and he then cried out to Rama that he saw the royal banner of Kosala and a large

army coming towards them and that no doubt, Bharata, having mounted the throne, was coming to kill them. He jumped down to the ground in great wrath, hastily armed himself, and asked his brother too to do likewise. Rama thought it more likely that Bharata was coming to see them in friendliness and brotherly love, and he gently chided his faithful brother for such unbecoming doubts, born, no doubt, of his great love for himself. However, the princes deemed it best to return to their hut with Sita, and they did so at once and awaited further events there.

Leaving his army at a distance and guided by a volume of smoke that rose above the trees, Bharata soon found the humble thatched dwelling, and he ran forward eagerly on seeing Rama seated there, with his wife and Lakshmana. He was overcome by grief to see the rightful sovereign of Kosala living in such a hut in the jungle, with matted hair and clad in bark, and all because of what his own mother had done for his sake. He fell down at his feet calling, "Brother," but choked with grief, he could say no more.

Rama took him up lovingly and could hardly recognise him, so changed he was, by grief, and penance and dressed like a hermit. He then said in a kindly tone: "I hardly know you, my brother, so thin and changed have you

become And why this matted hair, this garb of baik? Is our father alive and well? Is my mother well? and Sumitra? and Kaikeyi? And why have you come into the forests at all without ruling the kingdom?"

"What have I, an younger brother, to do with the kingdom? It is yours by right and olden custom, and I have come to take you to rule it. Our dear father, unable to bear the grief of your exile, died even before my return from my uncle's house, and myself and Satrugbha have already performed his funeral. Arise, my brother, for he loved you most, and please his departed spirit with offerings of holy water. He died pining for you and uttering your name."

Prince Rama was greatly grieved on hearing of his father's death and wept bitterly. He bewailed his sad fate that it was not given to him to be by his dear father's bedside during his last moments and perform his funeral on his death. For a Hindu rightly prizes that as a great good-fortune. Lakshmana and Sita also mourned for the King's death, and they all then went to the river Mandhahini, to bathe and make the prescribed offerings. Sumantra also joined them by this time.

On their return to the hermitage after the ceremonies, Vasishtha and the queen-mothers arrived, and great was Kausalya's grief to see her

hermit-like son and the life he led When Sita, with tearful eyes, bowed before her, the queen embraced her lovingly and said "Daughter of the king of the Videhas and daughter-in-law to Emperor Dasaratha, how live you and suffer in this wild jungle? My heart bleeds inwardly with grief to see your face which looks now like a faded lotus, or the moon dimmed by clouds"

After the salutations and greetings were over, they all sat down, and Rama again asked Bharata why he had donned the hermit's garb and come to the jungle The rest of Bharata's retinue had also joined them there

"King Dasaratha, our great king and father, is dead," replied Bharata earnestly, "and the kingdom is therefore yours by right I pray you forgive my mother's folly and crown yourself even here and now, as the ministers, our mothers, the army, are all present The olden rule is the golden rule and may not be set aside"

"Good, learned, and righteous as you are," replied Rama, "I know, Bharata, that you will not covet the crown when you have an elder brother I do not see the least fault in you But know that the king has an absolute right to order us all as he will, just as we have a right to order our wives and other dependants, and our duty is to obey him How can I then return

home or rule, when my father has bidden me to lead a hermit's life in the jungle for fourteen years and when my not doing so would make him false ? You too, my brother, are as much bound by the king's command and you ought therefore to rule the kingdom "

"My mother has yielded to my entreaties and agreed ; and I give you now the kingdom which was given me Therefore, I beseech you, come home with us and rule the land," replied Bharata On hearing these words, the people praised Bharata for his brotherly love and rare sense of justice, righteousness and duty.

Rama was greatly moved by his earnestness and grief, and he gently replied . " No man gets what he likes in this world We are not our own masters and we are driven about here and there by Fate Riches and all earthly goods come to an end, soon or late Even such gods as Brahma and Indra have their day, and cease to be Death is the sure, the certain fate of all living beings , and the sun, the moon, the stars and the seasons which we all admire and delight in, are all the while ruthlessly measuring of our allotted days And father and mother, wife and child, we are all but spars come together for a little while to part soon and drift for ever after, each his or her own way, on the vast sea of eternity Duty alone is lasting and good , I will therefore do my duty, that is. obey my

father and redeem his plighted word ; do you so too, my brother, and grieve not in vain."

"Born to a great and righteous king," replied Bharata, "and knowing the *dharmas* well, how can I ever accept the crown to the exclusion of my elder brother? Our father was our *guru*, a great man, our king, and he is now dead ; I must not therefore blame him openly. But who will approve of such an act as being just or right, that knows the true *dharma*? 'That the senses of men go astray when evil and ruin are about to overtake them,' is an old saying, and the King has proved the truth of it. He alone is the true son who sets aright the wrong done by his father. Below you in every way, how can I rule when you are alive? I pray you, I implore you bowing my head to your feet, return and rule the land."

"Years ago," replied Rama firmly, "when my father married your mother, Kaikeyi, he promised her father, your grandfather, to give the kingdom to the son born of her loins. Long after, he granted also two boons to your mother, and you have got the crown by one boon and I have been exiled by the other. The kingdom is therefore yours by a double assurance of the King our father, whose word we are all bound to obey. Let us not make the great King's word vain now. He gave up his very life for the sake of Truth, and shall we now make his

dear memory untruthful? Go back and crown yourself king, I pray you."



XXI. Bharata returns to Ayodhya.

THERE was a clever *rishi*, by name Jabali, and he sought to persuade Rama in a new way. A son's kinship to his father, said he, was quite an accident, and so, no great weight need be given to a father's word. In fact, all kinds of kinship, such as father, mother, son, brother, wife and so on, were fleeting and unreal. There is no God, no heaven but this earth. Beings are born, live, and then die and return to the elements which coming together, gave them birth. Each man to himself is the only wise law and the only duty. They who give up worldly pleasures and happiness for the sake of an unseen duty, or fancied right, are therefore fools who know not what they do. Clever and cunning priests have laid down rules for a number of funeral and other rites to be done even after a man is dead, solely to make themselves rich by such gifts. If food eaten by one man here could reach a dead man in a world other than this and refresh him, much more so should food given to one for the sake of another gone on a far off journey. It was all foolish and senseless. Jabali advised Rama to enjoy the pleasures

not wear out his days foolishly in the wild jungle.

Rama was very wroth to hear this, and rebuked the *nishi* for his false and misleading advice. 'Man is not a mere sport of chance or made up only of ever-changing matter. He has the divine soul in him which knows no death; and this soul can get peace and happiness only by truthful conduct. A false man or a liar can never make himself or others happy, and is feared by the world like a cobra. Truth alone leads to true happiness. There is no religion higher than Truth. God himself is naught but Truth. All things live and move and have their being in Truth. All laws, human and divine, are founded upon Truth. Therefore is Truth a man's first duty. How could he then, having given up the crown and taken a vow of exile at his father's bidding, now go back on his word?'

Then the sage Vasishtha declared that in Ikshvaku's line, the kingdom was always the birth-right of the eldest son, and he therefore asked Rama to return and rule the land. But Rama was firm, and answered that it was not proper for the sage to advise him against his duty. Thereupon Bharata got up in the midst of that great gathering and said. "Sages, ministers, and citizens, mark my words, I pray you. I did not ask my father for the kingdom; I did not tell my mother to do this, I do not

Bharata returns to Ayodhya

agree to my elder brother's exile. If I think that the exile is necessary to the king's word true, I will myself remain in exile for fourteen years in Rama's stead."

Rama then said, "Can I or Bharata change aught that has been sold, or left in trust by the late king, our father? also is this. I should be dead to all accept another in my place for the exile. all good befall my true and noble Bharata! I shall rule the kingdom with on my return after fourteen years."

The citizens and sages were greatly pained to see two such loving and righteous brothers and after much ado it was settled at last that Bharata should rule the land on behalf of Rama till Rama came back from exile, and Rama's sandals should be placed on the throne and be shown all the honours due to the king. Bharata vowed that, as Rama was the rightful king and suffered exile on account of what his own mother had foolishly done for his sake, he would rule the kingdom for him, living like a hermit in a village outside the capital, and that he would kill himself if Rama did not return after the fourteen years.

Then they all took leave of the three exiles and returned to Ayodhya. Bharata left the queen-mothers in the palace, placed Rama's sandals on the throne, and then came out of the

more knowledge and thought, and trim and guard it with ever-watchful care, it will shine brightly, and serve to guide our footsteps in the right path, and keep us away from the pleasant-looking but dangerous and deadly bog-land of the unruly senses. As a flower has both beauty and sweet smell, so has this golden lamp both light and power of speech. But its light will shine brightly only if we trim and feed the lamp; and its voice will rise high and be heard above the clamour of the senses only if we care to listen to it. And when we keep the lamp in trim and the voice in tune, there is indeed a wonderful light within us to guide us aright in this world where most of us grope so blindly, and still clear voice to warn and call us from forbidden and false tracks of life. A man has his conscience whole and hale, has indeed almost unerring guide in life, and his thought, words, and deeds are just, right, and truthful. But this conscience, though a God-given light, being under human care, sometimes either the lamp has not been fed well, or the wick has not been properly trimmed, or the voice is out of tune, and so the guide sometimes though very rarely, hesitates, or misleads while no one man is beyond error at times, less likely that thousands or millions of sciences of all men point the same way.

and nobler to take the course which is the least pleasant to us personally, to sacrifice our own pleasure or profit for the sake of truth or duty.

Rama held that it was his duty to redeem the promise of his king and father, and so he went into exile, cheerfully forsaking a kingdom. He felt that what his father did was not just or right, and when he sometimes tried to defend his father, it was only to persuade his brother Bharata, and he convinced no one. But he preferred what he deemed his duty to his father to doing what was just and right, because the latter course was in his favour. So he willingly made a sacrifice and unselfishly went into the jungle. Bharata, on the other hand, refused the crown and dwelt like a hermit in a humble cottage, because it was not just or right for him to be king, when his elder brother was alive. No one would have blamed him if he had obeyed his parents and accepted the crown, for he never sought it, and it was his duty to obey his elders. There was a sacrifice in the course of right and justice, and a great profit and pleasure in the path of duty. And he nobly chose the less selfish course and made the sacrifice. Fame is the united praise of mankind, and 'the path of duty always leads to glory,' because 'duties' are mainly based on the conscience of humanity. The track of pure Right and Justice is rougher, and he who treads it is more rarely crowned with fame.

That Bharata's sacrifice was as great as it was unexpected is proved by the fact that no one would believe him. The kingdom had been promised him even before he was born, and again by the grant of the boon. The king had a supreme right to dispose of it as he liked, and so Bharata had a sure right to the crown. His father mistrusted him, and so did Kausalya and Sumitra. His own mother never even dreamt that he would refuse it. Even Rama, who knew him best perhaps, did not expect that he would do so and prefer exile. And when he firmly declared his noble purpose and proceeded to act upon it, no one would believe him. Guha, Bharadwaja, and Lakshmana doubt him in turn. We generally judge others by our own minds, and all these men and women were good and righteous persons with a full sense of duty and justice. Yet they doubted him. So uniquely grand and noble was his conduct, so high above what they expected of even so good a prince as he was. Therefore does Kamban make the simple hunter-chieftain exclaim to Bharata: "A thousand Ramas are not equal to you, when we think of it well!" I will not be so sure, or so bold. I only wish to point out to you that both the brothers chose the less pleasant course; and the world then and now praised and praises them both. also that you should never follow Jabali's advice and yield to selfishness.

XXII. The Exiles Move On.

AFTER Bharata and the rest had left for Ayodhya, the exiles found their life at Chitrakuta not so pleasant as before. Bharata's army had encamped there and made the place dirty. The spot had no more the same charm for them, and it reminded them of the bitter parting from those so dearly loved. Rama and his companions therefore moved further on into the forest and reached the hermitage of the sage Athri. On their way they began to hear of the evil deeds of the Rakshasas. The *rishis* complained that they were molested and maltreated when they went about the forest in search of food, and that the Rakshasas sometimes made inroads even into their *ashramas* and marred their *vedic* rites and sacrifices. It was in fact the southern-most limit of Aryan settlement and sway. The Aryans had indeed, gone down further south, but they were much fewer there in number and dwelt amidst an alien people. Not very far from this border was Janasthan, where Ravana, the Rakshasa king of Lanka, had an outpost under Kara. It was about this Kara that the *rishis* complained most

to Rama, and they besought the two princes to rid them of the Rakshasa pest

The sage Athri welcomed the princes gladly, and his wife Anasuya, a venerable old matron, was very pleased with Sita. She praised highly her devotion to her husband, and presented her with fine clothes, jewels, flowers, and scents. The grey-haired lady gave the princess good advice and then made the sweet Sita tell her all about her own home, and how she came to wed the prince. So pleased was she with the beautiful Janaki that, not content with giving her the presents, she made her to put them on, then and there. Sita did so, and saluted the venerable lady, who then blessed her, and said that it gladdened her old eyes to see her.

The exiles then took leave of the sage and his wife and moved further on. They soon left Northern India and the Vindhya ranges far behind them and entered the great forest in the Deccan. From Allahabad (Prayag), they had gone southwards to Chitrakuta (in Bundelkhand), and now they were travelling towards the south-west. They first came across an Aryan settlement, a cluster of hermitages in a pleasant part of the forest situated near some crystal stream, and resounding with the chant of *vedic* hymns. The *rishis* welcomed them gladly and begged their protection from their foes, the Rakshasas. True, they had the power

of *tapas* and could use it against their wicked foes. But resentment and revenge ill became their saintly life, and so they asked the Kshattrya princes, whose duty it was to fight all evil persons and guard and cherish the good, to rid them of their foes. I have already told you that South-India was then peopled by the dark rude children of the soil, who dwelt in the jungle and on the hills, and by the cultured Dravidians, who lived in towns and villages and ruled the land. Who then were the Rakshasas, the dark, deformed, dreadful beings, who ate raw flesh and to whom night and day were alike, who took any form at will and were as strong as they were cruel, who goaded themselves on all kinds of meat and drink including even human flesh, and whose special delight was to worry the Aryan *rishis* and desecrate their holy fires? The question is easier asked than answered. The country is still peopled by the descendants of the Dravidians and the aborigines, with a large Aryan element. But no one claims to represent the Rakshasas at the present day. Even at the time of the *Ramayana*, they were few in number in the Deccan and unwelcome strangers. Their home was the isle of Lanka, where their King, Ravana lived. But we hear of them all over India, though not in large numbers, and they probably had a colony along the west coast up to Janasthan. Viswa-

mitra complained of their mischief far up in the north, and here down south more of them were harassing the Aryan *rishis*.

Stripping old stories of all poetic fancy and ornament, and bearing in mind the fact that all that we know of these 'night-walkers,' and 'raw eaters' is from books written by their foes who regarded them more as demons than men, I think the following may claim to be as good a guess as any other. They were a fierce and warlike non-*aryan* tribe whose strong-hold was Lanka, but who had also spread over the mainland of India to some extent. Like some other rude tribes we still have, they hunted chiefly by night and had no objection to raw meat. They were also civilised in their own way, in some respects more civilized than the *aryans* themselves. Their capital in Lanka was a very rich and beautiful city, and they had easy and speedy means of crossing over to the mainland. They did not regard fire as holy and were worshippers of Siva. They despised the *aryan* gods and fire-worshippers. An *aryan* sage, Vishrava, who wedded Bharadwaja's daughter and had a son Vaishnavana by her, was one of the first to push forward into the south, ambitious of royalty. He got to Lanka somehow and there wedded again Kaikasi, the only daughter of the Rakshasa king Sumali. There were four children by this hybrid union, Dhasanana, known later as

Ravana, Kumbhakarna, Shurpanaka, and Vibhishana. The sage gave his sons an *aryan* training, and the eldest, Dhasanana, was strong in *vedic* lore and could recite the whole of the *sama veda*. On the death of their father, however, the three brothers reverted to their maternal *rakshasa* creed and type, and drove back their eldest (step-) brother, Vaishravana, to the distant northern home of his own people, the *aryans*. Ravana soon made himself king of the *Rakshasas* and a most mighty king and warrior he was. The stories told of him are far more interesting than any fairy tale and I hope you will read them some time. Lanka and its wealth having thus become known to the *aryans*, who were slowly but very steadily pushing their sway southwards, Ravana placed some out-posts near the southernmost *aryan* settlements to check their advance. And these *rakshasa* guards of the border made inroads into the land of the *aryans*, and took special pleasure in harassing their *rishis* who, not unlike the Christian Missionaries of a later age, were the pioneers of *aryan* conquest. The princes promised their help to the frightened *rishis* and took leave of them the next morning. They had not gone very far into the forest, when they were met by Virata, a huge and powerful *rakshasa* giant. He asked them who they were and why they had a beautiful woman with them, if they were holy hermits

as their dress showed. He said that their conduct was a disgrace to all hermits and after thus upbraiding and threatening them, he suddenly seized the trembling Sita and carried her away. The grief and rage of Rama on seeing this were unbounded, and he bitterly blamed Kaikeyi for making such a thing possible. Before his very eyes, another man had touched his wife and was holding her on his lap and this, he said, pained him more than the death of his father and the loss of the kingdom.

I am sure that most of my Indian readers will readily and fully understand Rama's feeling. The jealousy that cannot bear to see another even to touch one's wife is said to be peculiarly a feeling of the East. In Rama's case, of course, the man was a wicked, non-*arayan* foe. But even otherwise, such a feeling is quite common with us. But other races and peoples, among whom women are not necessarily less chaste or men less lax in their morals, have other customs and ways. Nearly all over the West, men and women greet each other by 'shaking hands,' and it is the general rule for a woman to dance with and to be taken to dinner by a man who is *not* her husband. They blame us for treating our women like slaves and curbing their natural freedom, for regarding them as creatures made solely for our pleasure and convenience, as mere chattels. But this, by the way.

Rama and Lakshmana chased the bold Virata and soon forced him to leave Sita and fight them. There was a grim, tough fight, Sita witnessing it in great fear and anxiety. At last the princes managed to overcome and kill their foe, who, with his last breath praised their valour, told them the way to the nearest hermitage, belonging to the great *aryan* sage Sarabhanga, and asked them to bury his corpse according to the custom of his race. The princes gladly buried the giant and then took their way to the hermitage mentioned by him.



XXIII. Sita discourses on Duty.

When the exiles reached Sarabhanga's hermitage, that sage was about to pass away by entering fire. He was very old, he had done all his duties, and now gladly gave up his earthly body which was of no more use to him. He blessed them before he passed away, and directed them to another sage, Sudhikshana, who lived close by and who would tell them of a pleasant spot for their dwelling. If they walked along the bank of the river Mandhahini up-stream, they would reach his hermitage.

When Sarabhanga was no more, the many hermits who had come to his hermitage, prayed Rama to protect them from the mischievous and wicked *rakshasas* and declared that they had a

claim on him for such help, as he was a *kshattrya* and their king. Rama allayed their fears, and promised them that he and his brother would make it their sole task and duty, during their exile, to rid the land of the *rakshasa* pest and guard their holy *aryan* brethren to the best of their power. Then they all went together and reached the hermitage of Sudhikshana, who welcomed the princes gladly. The next morning they bathed in water, fragrant with the sweet smell of lotus flowers, and then finishing their prayers and rites, went into the forest to see some of the hermitages there, after taking leave of Sudhikshana.

It was Sita's practice to keep their arms safe for the night and give them back to them when they went out on the morrow. But the fight with Virata, and the promise of protection given by her husband to the *rishis* on the previous day, made her think, and her mind was troubled. So she gently addressed her husband when they were walking together in the forest next day. "You have donned this garb of bark, my husband, and taken upon yourself the hermit's life. It is a life of sacrifice and self-control, hard to live. Who controls not his mind gives room for three deadly sins,—lying, coveting another man's wife, and harming one who has done him no harm. My lord, you are quite free from the first two of

Sita discourses on Duty.

these sins, and I am sure they can not approach you. But I now fear that may perhaps come near you. You have to fight and kill the *raakshasas* in order to fight from their trouble. You brother Lakshmana now go about the fully armed. When therefore you meet *raakshasa*, you will be tempted to aim at him, although he may have done harm. Any weapon in a *kshattriya's* is like fuel kept close to a fire. I heard an old story that once upon Indra grew jealous of the great *tapas* sage, and seeking to mar it, left a sword in his charge to be kept safe for a time. As that some one might steal it away, the sword always by his side, and took it him whenever he went out in search of it. The constant company of that weapon of destruction so changed his mind and the bent his thoughts that he soon became cruel, mischievous, lost all his *tapas*, and at last went to hell. Such is the force of bearing deadly arms always. I remind you of this now, moved by my deep love for you and for fear that any thing untoward should happen. Think not, my dear husband, that I offer you advice, or that I deem myself wiser than you. I hold that even *raakshasas* should not be slain when they have done us no harm. It is a sin, and I fear that

you may be tempted into it by this vow and by being armed always. True it is a king's duty to punish the wicked and protect the good and the innocent. But this is not your kingdom, nor are you a king now. Though *lshattryas* by birth, we are exiles here, and you are leading the life of a hermit now. A king's duty is not therefore yours. Life in these jungles is hard and dreadful enough at times, and why should we court more trouble and danger needlessly? On our return to Ayodhya, you may rightly resume the duty of a king, but now only a hermit's life is befitting. Whatever our state in life, we must follow the *dharma* of that state. There is no one wiser, and there is nothing which is not known to you. I am a mere woman and out of the great love in my heart, I have spoken these words. Bear with me, my husband, and think well over this matter, and do only what is your proper *dharma* now."

Rama was deeply touched by his wife's earnest pleading, and he well saw how it came straight from her heart, and from the great love she bore him. He praised her warmly and declared that her noble words betokened not only her love for him, but also how worthy a daughter she was of the great *rajarishi* Janaka, rightly famed for his learning, wisdom, and righteousness. He gently soothed her fears and assured her that no evil would ever come of

doing what was good and right. The *rishis* had themselves sought his help and protection, and it was his duty as a *ksattriya* and a prince to grant them refuge and guard them from their wicked foes. So he had pledged his word to protect them, and he would not go back even an inch after doing so. She knew well how faithful to truth he ever was, and deeply, dearly, dotingly as he loved her, he could not surely love her so, if he did not love truth and honour even more. He would readily give up his very life, or Lakshmana, or even her, but never his duty. He again praised her love for him, vowed that he loved her even more, if that were possible, and soothed her fears.

They then wandered at leisure through the great forest, enjoying and admiring its many beauties and ever on the watch for any foes in hiding. They came upon a wonderful and large lake in the evening, known as *punyapsaras* and teeming with many a sweet-smelling water-flower and gay-plumed water-bird. One of the hermits who followed them told them of a fable about that lake,—how the sage Mandakarni was living happily in a palace underneath that lake, with five beautiful nymphs, amid much music and merriment. They stayed in a neighbouring hermitage for the night. In this manner, the exiles wandered on from *asrama* to *asrama* in Dhandakaranya, living in some for a few days

and in others for many months, and thus passed away pleasantly ten years of their exile



XXIV. The Story of Agasthya.

After thus passing ten years in various hermitages in the forest, the princes and Sita came back to the *asrama* of the sage Sudhikshana, and dwelt with him for some time. Rama asked Sudhikshana one day where was the hermitage of Agasthya, of whom he had heard so much, and whom he wished to see. Sudhikshana replied that he was himself about to suggest such a visit and told them the way. "Four *yochanas* to the south of this place," said the sage, "stands the hermitage of Agasthya's brother. *Pippali* trees, overgrown with creepers, abound there, as also countless other trees, bent with the weight of flowers and fruits. Swans and other water-birds in thousands will be found sporting in the clear pools and streams that make that spot so cool. Halt you there for the night. If you walk another *yochana* next morning by the side of that forest, southwards, you will reach the great Agasthya's hermitage. It is a densely wooded and lovely spot, which will surely delight you and Sita." The exiles took leave of the sage, and starting at once, they reached that evening the pleasant shady *asrama* of Agasthya's brother. They found there many *rishis* and other holy

Brahmans, and they were welcomed by the sage and stayed with him for the night. The next morning they took their way to Agasthya's *asrama*, admiring the many beauties of its approach. Hundreds of tame deer sported about the grounds, which rang with the song of birds and the chant of *vedic* hymns. Hordes of monkeys gambolled on the lofty trees, whose torn branches here and there bore witness to the elephant's lordly passage.

On nearing the hermitage, Rama sent Lakshmana to announce his and Sita's coming to the great sage. Lakshmana went forward and meeting with a disciple of the sage, addressed him thus. "Sir, there was a king by name Dasaratha. His eldest son, the heroic Rama with his wife Sita, has come to see the sage Agasthya. I am his brother Lakshmana, and I serve him. Perhaps chance you may have heard of us. We have come to this fearful forest at our father's bidding. We wish to see the sage. Do inform him, I pray you." The disciple went in to inform the sage, and returning soon, asked the exiles to follow him.

The great Agasthya, surrounded by many sages, came forward to receive Rama, and the exiles saluted him with reverence. The sage welcomed them with joy and showed them all the honours due to distinguished guests. He declared that the *rishi* who failed in his duty

to a guest would have to eat his own flesh in the next world, even like the man who bears false witness. He praised Rama highly and said that Dasaratha, who had begot such a noble and truthful son, was a very happy man indeed. He praised Lakshmana's devotion to his brother; and even more the courage and heroism of Sita, who, born and bred up as a princess, bravely dared to lead such a hard life with her husband, out of the great love she bore him. Such noble *pathurathas* were indeed rare in this world, for the minds of women were generally fickle as the will-o-the-wisp, changeful as the swallow's flight. He therefore advised Rama to love and cherish her always and to do nothing that might displease her. The sage entertained his guests, and then he presented Rama with some weapons famous in Aryan story, a bow burnished with gold and inlaid with gems, two quivers, a sword with golden hilt and scabbard, and an unfailing fiery bolt.

Rama then requested the sage to show him a pleasant spot where he could spend the rest of his exile. Agasthya thought for a while, and then named Panchavati, a lonely and beautiful grove near the Godaveri river. It was a lovely spot and only two *yochanas* from his own hermitage. He knew what was in Rama's mind and so he pitched upon that place. It abounded in fruit-trees and sweet roots. Sita, he was sure,

would be delighted with it. True it was lonely, and Rama had a wife, but the prince was brave and able to defend her. "You see yonder knot of *aluppa* trees," said the sage, showing them the way "Go to the north of it till you come upon a big banyan tree, and then you will see a small hillock. The ever-green and shady Panchavati is by its side."

The princes thanked the sage for his kindness, and the arms presented to them, and went towards Panchavati with Sita. On their way, they met Jatayu, a "vulture" who claimed to be their father Dasaratha's friend. Jatayu was probably a falconer, or the headman of a non-Aryan jungle-tribe who kept tame vultures, or he had a vulture painted on his banner, and so the Aryan poet describes him as a "vulture." Jatayu dwelt near Panchavati and he promised to look after Sita whenever the princes happened to go out hunting or on other business.

But who was the great Agasthya and what was the nature of "the unfailing and blazing bolt, the best of missiles," which he gave Rama? R. C. Dutt, the learned historian of Ancient India, writes as follows:—

"The name of Agasthya is connected with the Deccan, and many are the legends told of this great saint, before whom the Vindhya mountains bent in awe, and by whose might the southern ocean was drained. It is likely that

some religious teacher of that name first penetrated beyond the Vindhya, and founded the first Aryan settlement in the Deccan, three thousand years ago. He was pioneer, discoverer and settler, the Indian Columbus who opened out Southern India to Aryan colonisation and Aryan religion." But the Tamilians, who form a part of the Dravidians in Southern India, also claim him. He is known as the 'Tamil sage.' They say that he received the Tamil language from Siva's lips. His work, *Agathyam*, now lost, was the first in that tongue and the reputed basis of all later books. They also say that he was a great physician—most pioneers are—and that he wrote a book on medicine. He was very short, indeed no bigger than one's thumb, and he is therefore known also as the 'dwarf-sage' in Tamil. We are told that all the *rishis* and sages of India once came together on the Himalayas to witness Siva's marriage with Parvati and so the northern part of the country was depressed by their united weight and the south uplifted. Then Siva sent Agasthya, the thumb-like dwarf-sage to the south, as the only single person besides Himself, who could set right the balance; thus pointing out forcibly that true worth lies always in quality and not in mere bulk. Besides his pressing down the Vindhya, which may mean that he was

the first Aryan to discover an easy pass across that range of mountains, and his drinking up the southern ocean, which may denote that he was the first to find out the natural causeway between the mainland and Lanka, there is another gruesome legend told of this sage. There were two wicked *asura* brothers in the South, by name Ilvalan and Vatapi. They put to death many holy Brahmans and in this manner Ilvalan disguised himself as a Brahman and asked any true Brahman who happened to pass by, to be his guest for the day, as he was performing his father's *sraddham*. Mutton was eaten in those days by all classes and castes. Vatapi took on the shape of a sheep and Ilvalan duly killed and cooked him and served him as mutton to the *sraddha* Brahman. After he had eaten, Ilvalan called out aloud, 'Vatapi come soon,' and his brother tore open the Brahman's entrails from within and came out bleating like a sheep, all unhurt himself! Many an innocent and holy Brahman fell a victim to this trick, until Agasthya accepted Ilvalan's invitation one day, digested his brother Vatapi, and burnt the angry Ilvalan to ashes.

Dutt's guess about Agasthya seems to be the one most probable. The sage was a shrewd and successful pioneer, and he must have made friends with the Dravidian lords of the South.

and won their esteem and regard. A great Aryan scholar, he studied and easily mastered Tamil which was perhaps only a spoken tongue then, and may be he formed an alphabet for it and wrote a work on its grammar and language. This is all mere guess-work, but so is much of the history of those pre-historic times.

We have to guess in the same way of the wonderful and deadly bolts which are spoken of in the olden books. Viswamitra and Agasthya, perhaps the greatest of all names in those ages, give Rama these unfailing, blazing and all-powerful weapons of destruction and teach him the secrets of their use. We shall also read that Rama, by himself, or with Lakshmana to help, put to rout or killed a great number of fierce *rakshasa* warriors from time to time. It is not possible for one or two men, however brave, strong and skilful, to defeat in open fight a large number of men equally well armed, or even unarmed. There were no guns in those days such as we now have. But all the substances that go to make gunpowder and such other powerful means of destruction were known and possessed. Perhaps the secrets of making highly destructive bombs, shells and similar weapons of our times were known to a few of the old and famous sages and they imparted those secrets to Rama and other Aryan heroes who fought in their behalf. This will easily ex-

plain how those heroes were able to defeat, kill, or put to rout large hosts of their rude and fierce foemen

‘It never rains but pours,’ is an English saying. And I may as well have done with one more guess here and now. The gods and some kinds of half-divine beings are described in the olden books as able to move about freely in the air and to go from one world to another; but Indra alone, the king of the gods, is said to have an ærial car. I need not here speak of the power ascribed to *yogis* to be in any place in a moment, by merely thinking of it, to put on any shape, and to become invisible at their will, all by the force of their *tapas* and *siddhi*. Such powers are claimed by some even now in our country and I shall not say anything of it here. But an ærial car, other than Indra’s, is mentioned only very rarely as far as I am aware, and seems to have been something more than a mere fancy of the poet’s brain. In the *Ramayana*, Ravana alone has such a car and he got it from his step-brother whom he ousted from Lanka. In the *Mahabharata*, only one such vehicle is mentioned and it was brought by Kadorkaja, Bhima’s son by a non-aryan mother. In the old Tamil poem *Jivaka-chintamani*, a peacock-machine which could fly through the air is referred to and only once. I do not know of any other mention of such an

ærial conveyance and the owners of all the three cars noted above were non-aryans. Is it altogether impossible that such a contrivance, a distinguished and less risky forefather of the æroplane of these days, was known to a few of them and possessed by some of their chiefs? It is no doubt a wild guess, but an ærial car is an important item in these ancient stories of fact, fable and fancy, and seems to be not wholly a myth



XXV. A Rival to Sita.

ON reaching Panchavati, Rama chose a pleasant and shady plot of level ground, close by a stream in which the lotus grew plentifully, and not far from the sources of the Godaveri river. Lakshmana soon put up a small hut there for them to dwell in, making its mud walls strong with bamboo posts and thatching the roof with reeds, grass and leaves. The exiles lived there in quiet happiness for some time, visited occasionally by the hermits from Agasthya's *asrama*. They bathed in the Godaveri early every morning, attended to their holy rites and prayers, lived mostly on the sweet wholesome roots and berries, and spent their days in pleasant, useful talk, or in wandering about the forest to see its natural scenes and beauties. One day was just like another, and



Sita in Exile

The handsome features and noble bearing of the Aryan prince won her heart; and being then a widow, she wished to be wedded to Rama. She was herself not young, nor quite charming; but few women know their own ugliness; and she thought, naturally enough, that no poor, homeless hermit, living in such a hut in the forest, would refuse the hand of the sister of Lanka's mighty monarch. She therefore went to Rama, told him who she was and of her love for him, and naively asked him to marry her. She also pointed out what a great advantage it would be to him.

Rama was greatly amused at this, and for sheer fun, he replied gravely that he was a married man and had a wife who would not brook a rival, and he was therefore very sorry he had to refuse such a piece of good luck. However, his brother Lakshmana, was an equally handsome and brave man, and he was younger and had no wife then. Would he not suit her better? Shurpanaka took this in earnest, went to Lakshmana, and asked him to marry her. "I am not a free man," replied he, seeing at once that his brother was trying to poke fun at him, "I am now my elder brother's servant. It will ill become a great princess like you to wed such a low wight. My brother's wife is old, and what is her beauty to your matchless charms? He alone is fit to become your husband."

Shurpanaka returned to Rama and asked him again to wed her. But he was firm and advised her to try Lakshmana again. She had seen Rama first and fallen in love with him and her heart was full of a great and overwhelming passion for him. She thought, and indeed Rama had said so, that Sita was the sole hindrance to his marrying her. Fuming with rage, passion and shame, she rushed towards Sita. Alarmed at this, Rama called out to Lakshmana, and saying that it was ill playing with such fierce and wicked persons, bade him deform her and drive her away. Lakshmana drew his sword and cut off her nose and ears in part. Screaming with pain and shame, and with blood flowing profusely over her face and body, Shurpanaka ran back to Janasthan to complain to her brothers of the great insult and cruel wrong that had been done her.

Reader! I do not think that this was quite fair of the noble princes, unless indeed they did so to seek a quarrel with their *rakshasa* foes. But even then, why so cruelly mutilate a woman, and that too one who loved them? She did not know they were mocking her, and she believed that Rama unwillingly refused her hand because of his fear of Sita. I am afraid that this thoughtless and cruel wrong to a woman was the result of having a sharp sword in one's hand always,—just the evil which Sita

warned her lord against. Truly does a Tamil proverb say that the hand which has a knife, or itch, can never be quiet. But deeds done even in play, have their pitiless results. And this wanton wrong done to a woman became the cause, as you will see, of all the trouble and pain which the exiles had to undergo from that unhappy day.

You may wonder how the noble and righteous princes could stoop so low as to wrong a helpless woman, who had done them no great wrong, in that cruel and shameless manner, but you need not, if you only remember that they were *aryan* princes, and she a *non-aryan rakshasi*. In the history of man all over the world and in all times, we find that pride of race blinds even the noblest and the best sometimes to even the most common duties of life and the elemental rights of other men. They will not treat their horse or dog so, but men and women of another race, which they deem to be below them, they sometimes treat in the most inhuman and incredible manner. And strange to say, not even the most civilised and cultured nations are quite free yet from this vice in the blood, from this touch of nature which links man to the tiger and the hawk. They have the most humane and just laws among themselves and behave to each other nobly. But towards an inferior race, inferior it may be and

often is only in not having equally destructive and mighty weapons of warfare, the same sharpness of tooth and claw and strength of brawn and sinew, they adopt quite another line of conduct, their own laws being precious pearls too good to be cast before such swine. The blood-curdling atrocities we hear of from the American woods and plantations from time to time, and the close study and observation of international life and history generally, amply prove this. Truly has a great poet sung that—

*“Sad is it to be weak, ’tis sadder to be wrong,
But if the strong God’s statutes break, ’tis saddest
to be strong”*



XXVI. The First Great Fight

WHEN Kara, the great Ravana's and lord of Janasthan, saw the plight of his beloved sister, and heard had come by such a grievous and cruel he was beyond himself with rage. He the immediate destruction of the two forts, who went about armed and his young and beautiful woman, and bade the warriors who were by his side to and kill them. Shurpanaka went to show the way to the hermitage of Rama saw them coming, and lea

mana to guard Sita, he went forth fully armed to meet them, and soon killed them all off.

The Aryans seem to have been very able and skilled bowmen; and though the non-Aryan races also had bows and arrows, they were not so well-skilled in their use, and relied more on spears, swords, javelins and clubs. These latter weapons are useful only in close fighting. A skilled and clever archer can easily kill off, or disable a large number of his foes, before they approach him, and the fall of so many comrades will naturally frighten others and make them take to their heels. This fact, and the special missiles and firearms already spoken of, should be borne in mind whenever we read of a large number of their foes being put to rout or killed by the princes. And Kothanda-Rama was the greatest archer in all Aryan story. At Agincourt, we are told, a small number of English archers put to flight a vast French army and won the battle.

Shurpanaka fled back in fear and grief and told Kara what had chanced. He could hardly believe her, and when she taunted him with cowardice and lack of strength in order to rouse his rage and increase his thirst for revenge, he foamed with fury, and at once set off with his brother Dhushana and his guard of valiant warriors. They came in chariots emblazoned with gold and gems, tingling with bells, gay with

many flags and festoons, and drawn by swift and richly bedecked horses. But as Kara neared the lonely hut of the exiles, he and his brother saw some bad omens and their hearts sank within them, although they still vaunted aloud their rage. With trumpets pealing, horns blowing, drums beating and other martial music, they came on. On hearing the sound of their approach, Rama sent Sita with Lakshmana to a neighbouring cave for safety, and then bravely awaited his foes. They came with loud boasts and threats, brandishing their weapons in the air. Rama stood calm and undaunted, and when they came within bow-shot distance, he poured on them a volley of his deadly and well-aimed arrows and threw one or two of his dreadful missiles into their midst. Many a noted *rakshasa* fell to the ground, dead or dying, his hands still grappling his dreadful weapons, his boasts half uttered on his tongue. The foremost ranks of the foes were much thinned, and there was a sudden pause and silence, followed at once by wild confusion and fear. More arrows and missiles came flying into them, and soon the noisy mob turned back and fled. Dhushana saw their panic and tried to rally his men with these words

"Is this your first fight, O ye *rakshasa* warriors, or this puny man your first great foe? Have ye not ere now faced the mighty *devas*

themselves in the bloody field, and who fled then? Did you learn this base flight of them at that time?

“So many brave warriors flee before one man now. Sword in hand, ye run back to your homes: Seek ye to embrace your beautiful wives there, and enjoy the sweets of love with them? But tell me, when your loving dames gladly welcome you, their heroic lords returning home from the field of glory, will ye, O shameless cowards, show them your breasts with the noble wounds of the foe’s arrows, or rather your backs, with the scratches and bruises made on them by thorns and branches of trees, during your mad flight through the jungle? When ye came to the field, your eyes flashed like molten copper with fierce rage and hatred. But now, alas! they are white with fear like milk. Born fighters as ye are, and fleeing the field of battle and your sole duty, will ye take to trade now for your livelihood, or perhaps change your spears and swords into plough-shares and live even as tillers of the soil? Tell me, I charge you, how ye mean to live hereafter, and then flee this field. Forget ye now, O shameless cravens, that even those very swords and spears are not your own, but weapons wrested by you ere now from the hands of your enemies on the field of glory!

“Alas! What greater shame can befall us hereafter? The finger of scorn and lasting

behold, and clad in a gaudy livery, stood behind the throne, bearing his swords, spears and other arms, the dreaded scourges of his foes. His trusted ministers and friends were standing in front of the throne on either side, watching his moods carefully, and with a mingled sense of awe, admiration and affection. He was the greatest monarch of their race and they all adored him in their hearts. In the passage leading into the *darbar* hall, were numerous minstrels and bards singing his praises and fame, and attendants ever ready to obey his commands. There were also skilled and beautiful dancers, famous wrestlers and swords-men, musicians and other artists, eagerly awaiting the royal pleasure.

Ravana, the son of an Aryan sage by a non-Aryan princess, was now a man past the prime of life. His was a well-trained athletic frame of great proportions, and though he was not a huge giant like his next brother Kumbakarna, he was far and away the strongest man of his age and the most famous warrior in the South. I have already told you that he was a great *vedic* scholar and that he had probably reverted to his maternal *rakshasa* type and ways on his father's death, after he had driven away his elder step-brother from Lanka and seated himself on the throne. He had then strengthened his power and extended his sway, waging many battles with his foes and winning the immortal glory

that ever after clung to his name. He married Mandodhari, the beautiful daughter of Maya, who was perhaps a native of what is now known as Burma. She, like Sita, was one of the *pancha kannyas*, five women noted for their purity and *pathivratha dharma*. Ravana had a son by her, Meghanadha, who was already a famous warrior and who had won for himself by his valour the name of 'Indrajit'. Ravana had other wives also and children by them, but Maya's daughter was his chief wife and queen, and Indrajit his heir and the greatest of his sons, a hero worthy of his great father.

It is a law of nature that no single being shall be a perfect example of its kind in every way, and a little observation will show this clearly to you. Among your own friends, for instance, you will always find that if one is more endowed than the rest with physical beauty, strength, keenness of sight, sharpness of hearing, acuteness of mind, or any one or more of the countless qualities that all together go to make a human being perfect, he is markedly lacking in others. There is no man in the world without some good quality, nor is there one who has all and is perfect. This is evidently mother Nature's way of being just and impartial to her children; and the end of all learning and civilization, all right human endeavour in fact, is to bring together as many good qualities in as many men as possible.

Ravana, as I told you, was one of the strongest of men and a very great warrior, but Nature took it out of him for this, I suspect, by not endowing him with an equally wise and strong understanding. You shall judge of this for yourself from all that I shall tell you of him in this story.

The King of Lanka was holding court one day when Akambana, a *rakshasa* of the outpost at Janasthan, was announced. The dire news was soon told, and so great was the wrath and fury of Ravana on hearing of the fall of his half-brothers, Kara and Dhushana, that the messenger trembled for his very life and entreated the king to spare him. It is not very unusual, though very unreasonable, for the high and the mighty to visit their wrath on the innocent bearer of any evil tidings. But luckily for Akambana, the monarch's rage took a different turn, and he ordered his aerial car at once to fly forth with to Janasthan and punish with torture and death the impudent men who had dared to wrong his sister and slaughter his two brothers and their followers. Akambana knew better the nature of the "impudent men," and he had seen and felt the matchless weapons and skill of Rama. He feared, that however strong and brave his king might be, he would be no match for the Aryan princes, and so he addressed Ravana as follows

"The game of war is always one of doubt, Most Mighty Sire, and the two Aryan princes from the North have such dreadful missiles with them. Your Majesty's humble slave who has seen them and their arms, therefore begs leave to suggest a ruse by which the two men can be slain easily and without any risk. Rama has a wife, who is the most beautiful of women, and he loves her more than his life. If Your Majesty only brings her away cunningly, the two men will very soon die of grief."

"Say you so?" said Ravana, after thinking for a while. "And it does not seem to be a bad plan; yes, it is the best and I shall follow it."

Thus was Ravana's righteous and noble determination to fight his foes openly and kill them, soon changed for a mean trickiness, and he set forth in his car to seek the help of Maricha, the most cunning of *rakshasas*, to carry out this new plan.

But Maricha told him that it was quite dishonourable and utterly unworthy of him to stoop to such a base trick, and he succeeded in sending him back to Lanka, fully persuaded that Akambana's plan was not right. But though Ravana yielded to Maricha's pleading on this head, he was not willing to let the thing alone altogether, as Maricha advised him to do. His own sister had been cruelly insulted and injured and his half-brothers and guards killed

unjustly. It ill became the name and fame of the King of Lanka to put up with such an act. He therefore called his ministers and was consulting them on the matter, when his beloved sister Shurpanaka came in, wailing aloud and reproaching him bitterly for his shameful sloth. A look at her cruelly deformed face and her woeful, haggard appearance was enough to raise the monarch's rage to white heat again. He swore to avenge her wrongs fully and speedily and asked her what she did to be so treated by the hermits. Shurpanaka knew that the bare truth would not meet with her brother's sympathy. The great King of Lanka would have nothing but scorn and rebuke for a sister who, out of a shameless passion, sought to wed a poor Aryan hermit. She knew her brother well and also his love of female charms, and she cunningly changed her story to suit him.

Sita, said she, was a very goddess on earth nay, more, for no goddess could be so beautiful. Earth was not good enough for her feet to touch it, nor Heaven itself fair enough to hold her. Hers was a 'beauty such as never woman wore'. Shurpanaka described Sita's charms to her brother in glowing words and with all the tact and guile she was mistress of. She declared that "but to see her was to love her, love but her and love for ever". If she, a woman, was so bewitched by her charms, what would be

brother's fate when he saw her? Such peerless and divine beauty, he alone, mightiest and most famous of monarchs, deserved to enjoy, and she could not bear to see it wasted in the jungle, in a poor hovel. Out of her great sisterly love, therefore, she had sought to get Sita for him and this was her reward. Her brothers had been slain, their force destroyed, and she herself most cruelly disgraced and deformed. Now that she had told him, she would kill herself, for she was ashamed to live any longer. If he had even a spark of kingliness or bravery still left in him, she besought him to arise and avenge her wrong.

On hearing these words, only one passion burned furiously in Ravana's bosom, and that was the passion to get Sita for himself. He forgot the cruel injury done to his sister, the death of his brothers and the loss of Janasthan. The one yearning of his heart now was to possess such a beautiful gem among women and Akambana's plan seemed again most suited for the purpose. War was a doubtful game; and though he himself had not the least doubt of being able to kill the two hermits easily, he feared that Sita might kill herself on then death and he would lose her, for was he not told that she loved her husband deeply and would not even look upon, much less love another? It was therefore best to guard against

it and get hold of her first. Her husband and his brother would then die of grief, or might be put to death afterwards, and then she would surely yield. He therefore made up his mind to get possession of Sita stealthily and bring her away to Lanka and then think of the rest. And burning inwardly with a fatal and overwhelming passion, he ordered his ærial car and went again to seek Maricha's help.



XXVIII. Maricha the Rakshasa Sage.

A scalded cat dreads all water, and if there were means of becoming proof against scalding, there is no doubt that many a wise cat would soon adopt them. Maricha was such a *rakshasa*. The reader knows him already: he it was who escaped with his life and fled from Rama's arrows during Viswamitra's *yagam*, and it was his mother, Thataka, that Rama killed at the bidding of that sage. Maricha therefore knew well the power of *tapas*, and Rama's deadly skill in archery. On fleeing southwards, he seems to have thought it all over within himself, and to have at last made up his mind to turn over a new leaf in his life. He did not return to Lanka, or Janasthan, or the company of his brethren elsewhere, but quietly betook himself to a lonely life of *tapas* in a hermitage.

It had struck him forcibly that a righteous life was after all safest and happiest in this world, and famed as he was as the most cunning and resourceful of the *raikshasas*, he had buried all his craft in a lonely *asrama* and was leading the life of a hermit now.

When he saw his king come back to him again and so soon, he was greatly alarmed, and eagerly asked why he had done so. Ravana eagerly informed him, and Maucha, heaving a doleful sigh, began to plead with him again.

“Many will court roval favour with pleasant speech and counsel, O my king, but he is the real friend who speaks out boldly the truth which can alone end in good. For lack of spies, you have not heard of the great Rama’s skill in arms and prowess. But I know him only too well, and never till I die can I forget the force of those dreadful weapons and that matchless bow. Deem them not as poor hermits, I pray you, but rather as the flower of the Aryan race, armed with the secrets of the most deadly missiles. And learn, my king, this truth from me, a truth which I have learnt so late and at such great cost. Goodness and Right can alone, and will always thrive and win, and Evil can never prevail against them. Remember what you owe to your own great *tapas* of your early days and forget not that your might and fame are all due to that only. Sita is a true wife and

loves her husband more than aught else in this world. I have already told you how I narrowly escaped death at Rama's hands when my mind was all evil and I sought to spoil a sage's sacrifices. Rama was a mere youth then. I met him again lately in Dhandakaranya, and thought that in his hermit's life, he had perhaps forgotten and lost his skill in the use of his bow. But no: from my place of hiding, I saw him send an arrow at a distant, fleeing stag and the fatal aim was as unerring and sure as ever. I dread even to think of it now. And this great warrior has forsaken a kingdom and come into the fearful jungle for the sake of Truth, and his wife, a born princess and most tenderly nurtured, has followed him even into such a hard life, out of the great love she bears him. Think you, then, that she would ever look upon another man with aught but scorn, or that he would easily let go such a priceless jewel? The love of woman is the curse of man, nay, even the gods suffer for it. Many and beauteous are your loving wives, O mighty king, nor does the blood of senseless, hot youth now seethe in your veins. For shame, my king, leave off this evil thought and covet not another man's wife. What an example would it be to Meghanadha and your other sons, if *you* behave so at such an age? Such conduct in the king may prove the ruin of all our race."

"I came not here seeking your advice, or to hear you discourse on morality," replied Ravana angrily. "The Aryan has come into my land, cruelly and wantonly wronged my sister, and killed my brothers and guardsmen. He has thus wilfully sought my enmity. The lamb has foolishly bearded the lion in his own den. Shall I meekly bow my head to all this disgrace? Is it not just for me to carry away the wife of my foe who has so injured my sister and do what other harm I can to him? He has sown the wind and he shall reap the whirlwind. I know what I am about and I want you only to help me to get possession of Sita by some cunning device. You are not my counsellor and I do not wish to tarry here all day, and hear you praise the skill and valour of a puny Aryan youth. Weakling as you are, I do not wonder at it, nor at your cowardly fear of the Aryan's bow. You little know your monarch's strength and valour, nor is it meet for me to boast of it now and before such as you. Arise, I command you, and mount my car with me and help me to get the beautiful Sita."

Maricha again pleaded hard and entreated his king to desist, but in vain. He then prayed that he at least may not be asked to help in the matter, as he was so afraid of Rama, and he was now leading a new life and hated to practise his former guile, or take part in evil deeds. Ravana,

foaming and furious with passion, drew his sword and threatened to slay him then and there, if he did not do his bidding at once, and pointed out that he was bound to obey his king. Maricha unwillingly yielded at last, choosing the doubtful future to immediate and certain death, and the two set out on the ærial car towards Panchavati.

XXIX. A Strange Sanyasi,

RAVANA and Maricha reached Janasthan, and the *rakshasa* king was wild with rage to see the deserted state of his out-post, and the bloody field near Panchavati where his step-brothers and other warriors had fallen. The vultures, jackals and other beasts and birds of prey had left nothing but their bones which now lay bleaching in the sun. He vowed vengeance on the daring Aryans who had done such havoc, and he could hardly refrain from attacking them at once. But when he saw Sita on their way to the river, from a safe place of hiding, he found her far more beautiful than his sister's words or his own fancy had set her forth, and all his wrath gave place to an overwhelming passion and a longing to possess her at any cost. He and Maricha observed the daily life and habits of the exiles and then planned their snare. Sita was fond of deer and never tired of watching them sport about the grounds. They also noted that when one of the

brothers went out to kill game, or for any other purpose, the other always remained behind to guard Sita.

There was a half-tame spotted deer at Janasthan which had belonged to Kara. It was a singularly beautiful animal with glossy light-brown skin and round snow-white spots which shone like silver marks on a ground of gold. Kara had covered the horns with gold leaves, and added, so he thought, to the native beauty of the animal in other ways. This noble beast was brought and let loose near the hermitage at Panchavati to attract Sita's attention one morning. She saw it soon after their return from the river and was delighted. The animal was only half tame and in a strange place. It now nibbled the emerald grass, now stared at her, and then frisked about half scared. Sita called her husband and Lakshmana and showed them the pretty beast. Lakshmana at once said that it did not seem to be a common wild deer, as the horns glittered like gold, and that it was perhaps some *rakshasa's* snare or decoy.

"Infinite are the beauties and freaks of nature, my brother," replied Rama, "and who knows but some deer may have such rare beauty? It is indeed a charming beast."

"I pray you, get it for me, my husband," said Sita eagerly, and in almost childlike joy and excitement. "It will be the wonder of the

zenana and the whole city when we return home after the exile is over. See, how it quietly nibbles the grass now. I pray you, catch it for me."

Lakshmana again expressed his doubts and said that he would chase and catch it. But love will not be served by proxy, and Sita gently turned to her lord, her eyes filling with tears, and asked "Will not my lord catch it for me himself?" Rama at once got up, bow in hand, and charging Lakshmana to look after Sita, went towards the deer. He said that even if it were an illusion or a snare as his brother feared, it was best to get to the root of the matter, and he bade Lakshmana not to leave Sita alone even for a moment, but watch and guard her carefully. The beast heard his steps, stared at him, and then frisked away to a distance. Rama ran after it, and both were soon lost out of sight in the forest. After some time, a cry of alarm was heard faintly and from a distance within the forest, and it seemed like Rama's voice calling on Sita and Lakshmana. On hearing that doleful cry, Sita was greatly anxious for the safety of her dear lord and bitterly repented her wilfully sending him away on such a wild chase. She then asked Lakshmana to follow his brother the way he had gone into the forest and see what had happened.

"I cannot leave this place and you alone here

against my brother's express order," replied Lakshmana. "Fear not, my sister, and believe me when I say that this seems to be a foul trick of some cunning foe, and I must not therefore leave you alone now. It was not my brother's voice, though somewhat like it. My brother has gone out well armed and no harm can befall him."

"It was *his* voice and I know it," rejoined Sita, "and he called on us both and no doubt he is in some grave danger. Perhaps it was his dying voice and some *rahshasa* is killing him. Do you still stay here after hearing that piteous cry and call yourself a faithful and loving brother? Run at once for his help, I charge you. Nothing can happen to me here in our home, in a little while."

"I cannot disobey him and it was a false alarm," pleaded Lakshmana again, "I pray you, calm yourself, my brother will soon be back safely."

"Base and disloyal that thou art," burst forth Sita in rage and grief, her eyes streaming with tears, "I see thee in thy true colour only now. Thou hast feigned love and faithfulness all these days, only to forsake him at just such a moment and then keep me for thyself. I see through thy deep cunning and thy horrid lustfulness only now. It was for this, all thy weeping and praying to come with us into the forest. But

I swear, it shall not be I will set fire to this hut even now and burn myself to death, entering *swarga* with my dear lord hand in hand. O cruel wretch that I am, to thus send my loving lord to his death and keep this false and deadly viper with me!" And she sobbed bitterly.

"Doubt not my faith or brotherly love," exclaimed Lakshmana in grief and indignation, "nor accuse me of such un-nameable iniquity. I look upon you as on my mother Sumitra and may I rot in hell for countless ages if ever I have harboured an unholy thought towards you, or sinned against my brother in thought, word or deed! Fie, my sister, wipe off such unbecoming doubts from your mind and pollute not your truthful tongue with such words. But it is the way of all women in this world, they are so fickle and foolish and cruel."

"I will drown myself in the Godaverī, or burn myself to death here, without Rama," said Sita amidst her sobs, "I cannot bear even to look on another man. O what shall I do? He still stands here I shall kill myself."

On hearing these words and seeing her grief, Lakshmana said "Most unjustly and cruelly do you doubt me, O daughter of the wise Janaka, and may God forgive you for it, and not make you rue and bitterly repent this moment later. My brother is my god and I know no law but his word. But I cannot bear to

see you thus or hear such words and so I go now to seek him. This is indeed Fate and I bow now to its all-powerful mandate. May the guardian deities of the forest protect you from all evil and harm, and may God grant that we shall find you again here safe, when I return with my brother."

And armed as he was, he sadly went into the forest, his heart burning with rage and grief, and heavy with a vague sense of coming evil.

I have already pointed out how Rama had thoughtlessly erred in treating Shurpanaka with such wanton cruelty, and how that was to become the source of all his future misfortunes and troubles. Lakshmana had then obeyed his brother without a word of remonstrance, and so he too had erred with him. But Sita had done nothing then, and for aught I know, she might not have been even aware of it at the time. But now, in such foul suspicion of the noble Lakshmana, she was unpardonably wrong, and she was to pay for it dearly very soon. While at Ayodhya, she might not perhaps have had opportunities of knowing Lakshmana's character well. But now, they had been living together for more than ten years, and she must have been alone with him many a time during that period. The instinct of a chaste woman is keener and truer than that of a man, and she reads at once even an impure thought or gesture. Sita must have

therefore known and proved again and again her brother-in-law's spotless purity of mind and rare self-abnegation and brotherly love Lakshmana himself says later that he did not know her features well, because he had never dared to look above her feet, and we can believe it of him Sita, no doubt, spoke out of her great love for her husband and her fear for his life. She honestly and fully believed that the cry was his and that he was in grave danger She had perhaps also an unbecoming self-consciousness of her own rare beauty and charms and of their effect on other men But nothing can ever justify her behaviour to Lakshmana, and terribly did she rue and pay for it ever afterwards in her unfortunate life

No sooner was Lakshmana gone than Sita came out, drying her tears, to look anxiously on all sides for her husband's return, when she saw a *sanyasi* coming towards her It was no other than Ravana who had so disguised himself against any mischance and to get to her easily She welcomed him and asked him who he was, first telling him briefly of herself. Ravana could hardly contain his burning passion, or feign long to be a *sanyasi* He first told her that he was coming then from Lanka, and made an excuse of it to praise its mighty monarch, that is himself, indirectly But when she said that the abode of the wicked *rakshasas*

was a strange place for an ascetic to go to and then king a strange man for him to extol, he revealed himself to her and begged and entreated her to accept his love. He asked her to go with him to Lanka, and become the mistress of his heart and of all his vast riches and power. A young fawn in the grip of a tiger could not have shuddered with fear more than Sita on her first learning who her visitor really was, but his love-making and impudent proposal roused her rage and scorn. She boldly rebuked him for his wickedness and told him to be gone at once, lest her dear lord should return and kill him, even as he had killed his brothers Kara and Dhushana. This reminded Ravana that there was no time to be lost, for the princes would indeed return soon, and he did not wish to fight or kill them now and thus risk his chance of getting Sita to wife. He therefore seized her suddenly and carried her, screaming, struggling and wailing aloud, to his ærial car which was waiting in a cove near by. He mounted it with her and then started the car, but ere long he was met by Jatayu who rated him roundly and challenged him to fight. There was a short, sharp struggle, but old Jatayu was no match for Ravana and soon sank to the ground, mortally wounded and with both his arms lopped off. Ravana then made straight for Lanka, and Sita lamented loudly all along the

way, and shed bitter tears, and reproached herself for her cruel treatment of Lakshmana which had enabled the Rakshasa to carry her off. In her wild grief, she called on the trees, the hills, and the streams, and the birds and beasts of the forest to inform her dear lord of her sad fate. Nor did she spare her wicked kidnapper.

"You call yourself a hero and a king!" exclaimed she to him in burning scorn and rage, "Have you no shame then, to come thus when I was all alone and carry me away like a thief? If you have any courage, if you are a man, you should have come openly when my brave lord was present, and fought him. Then indeed you would have known what it is to stand before his matchless bow. And yet you came praising your own heroic feats and prowess so highly! Fie upon it! O what shall I do! But dream not to escape my lord's just wrath. He will surely find you out soon and slay you for a base and ignoble kidnapper of helpless women. Therefore, I advise you, leave me here at least." Thus she reproached and wailed by turns, but it was all in vain. While passing over a hill, Sita saw some men standing on its crest, and thinking that they might perhaps meet with her husband and Lakshmana, she tied some of her jewels in a piece of her yellow silk-cloth and threw it towards them. They too saw her, but Ravana did not notice what she did.

On reaching Lanka Ravana took Sita to his zenana, placed her in a lonely and splendidly-furnished chamber, and ordered some maids to wait upon her and give her whatever food, silks, or jewels she might ask for. He then sent eight chosen warriors to Janasthan to watch Rama and Lakshmana and note carefully and secretly their further course. Having done this, he returned to Sita burning with overwhelming passion. He showed her the magnificence and matchless riches of his palace and begged her to have some pity for him and favour his love. He offered her all his empire and his throne and to make his queens her handmaids. He fell at her feet and implored her forgetting all his boundless pride and royal state.

‘ Rama is my lord, and the royal swan that loves to play with her mate in the lotus pool does not pair with the black and base-born crow of the filthy gutter ’ was Sita’s firm and scornful answer, and she again reproached him bitterly. She threatened to kill herself the moment he dared to touch her again, or force her love, and he too, wicked though he was, loved her too well and too deeply now to be rude to her. He removed her to an *asoka* pleasure-garden and appointed some women to watch and guard her and attend to her needs. He bade them persuade her by threats or soft speech, by incessant importunity and cunning means to favour his love.

XXX. The Forlorn Husband.

WHY did Sita speak so to Lakshmana? No one that I know of has explained this. There was no doubt that she was wrong, quite wrong. But I doubt whether such a thought would have entered her pure mind without even the ghost of a reason, however vague or fantastic. Rama and Lakshmana saw Sita together at Mithila. She was the most beautiful princess of their time and the daughter of the most famous Rajarishi of all time. Lakshmana was no puny weakling, and would have strung the famous bow as well as Rama. He was only two days younger than his brother, and by this little accident alone, he had lost Sita. He loved his brother too deeply and too fondly to envy him. Lakshmana perhaps never thought of it all in this manner, at any rate, we know nothing of it. But surely, a vain, passing, vague feeling of what might have been, born of the purest admiration, a mere momentary flash of such a thought, would not have been altogether unnatural even in the best-disciplined mind, when such a paragon of female charms, culture and virtue was the prize. In Lakshmana's noble mind, such a thought would not have found any place to rest in, but it might just have flitted over it once or twice, for he too was human. This much is certain, that Rama was his ideal of perfect manhood, of a true hero. May it not be that Sita was his ideal of perfect womanhood, of

a true wife? We have every reason to think that she was, that he admired and revered her more than any other woman, that he found a pure and rare happiness in being near her. He sought earnestly to follow his brother into exile, in sooth, forced his company on him, only after Sita had claimed it as her right and striven for and won her husband's consent. That was a moment when Lakshmana's admiration of her wifely devotion must have doubled or trebled itself, and he must have longed to accompany his dear brother into the jungle as much to serve him as for the pure pleasure of serving her too and making the troublesome journey as comfortable to her as possible. He had a proof of it again in her acute anxiety and fear for her lord's safety, when he was guarding her in the cave and Rama was fighting the Janasthan *rakshasas*. And now, her sudden consternation and grief on hearing the cry for help which she thought was her husband's, perhaps set him thinking again of what a priceless pearl she was. He had no doubt it was a false cry, and no fear for his brother's safety. So it may be that he stood there in front of the hermitage, resting on his bow, with a far-off look in his eyes, while the vague dream, born of the overflowing admiration in his heart, just flitted once again over his mind for the second or the third time in his life, only for a moment and nothing more. And it may be, that Sita, her heart torn with bitter repentance,

grief, anxiety and a vague dread of imminent evil, just caught that dreamy look of seeming unconcern not uplifted by the glow of admiration in his heart, and mistook it. The reader will take this along with other guesses for what it is worth.

Rama did not find it easy to catch the pretty beast, which was just tame enough for him to get near, yet not so tame as to let him catch it. He was thus duped many a time and led on some way towards Janasthan, when he too heard, near by, the cry, I have already mentioned. He then suspected foul play by some *rakshasa* foe, and aiming a missile at the bush whence the cry had come, went near. He saw there to his amazement, the *rakshasa* Maricha, whom he already knew. His missile had wounded him mortally and he was just expiring. Rama turned from the gruesome sight, with alarm for the safety of his wife and brother. The deer, startled by the cry, had already run away. Valmiki says that Maricha himself came in the form of a deer, was hit by Rama's arrow, and died uttering the cry. Rama hurried back homeward and soon met Lakshmana coming towards him, with a sad and downcast face, and alone.

"Alas! Lakshmana!" exclaimed he, "What folly is this? Why have you come alone, and where is Sita? Have you come here, misled by

the wicked Maricha's false alarm, or has anything else happened? Speak, my brother, tell me, is she alive and well? Or has any *rakshasa* killed or carried her away, through your carelessness? Why are you mute and why look you so sad? My heart flutters with fear. Tell me, I charge you, why have you come alone?"

"I have not left her alone and come here of my own free will," replied Lakshmana, in a tone of mingled wrath and grief. "She heard the cry and bade me go at once to your help. I tried my best to convince her that I should not disobey your word, that it was a false alarm given by some of our foes, that you could be in no danger. But she would not hear, or believe me. She was half mad with grief and fear and she accused me of unspeakable baseness and treachery. She threatened also to kill herself at once, if I did not leave her and go to you. I could not bear to hear such words, my brother, and so I have come, sore against my will. God grant we may find her safe on our return."

"You should not have minded what she said in her rage and grief," replied Rama, "and you are to blame, my brother, for leaving her alone. Yonder lies dead the wicked Maricha, who made the false cry, and I fear it is even as you said, some cunning plot of our *rakshasa* foes. My heart misgives for Sita's safety. Let us make haste and rejoin her."

Fancy for yourself the feelings of Lakshmana on hearing these words of Sita's husband! The brothers ran back to the *asrama* with heavy hearts and alas! found it empty

Rama was already faint with hunger and thirst after chasing the deer and he now quite broke down with grief at the loss of his beloved wife. He wailed aloud and wept like a child. He ran about the suburbs of the *asrama* to see if she was anywhere there. He called her by name and prayed her to pity his sad plight and return at once to him, if she was playfully hiding herself anywhere. In his wild anguish, he questioned the trees, the deer, the streams and the flowers which she loved so well, if any of them had seen her. He declared that he could not bear life even for a day without her, and that he felt the bitterness of his exile only that day. He had pledged his word of honour to defend the *rishis* from their *rakshasa* foes; and there he stood, unable to safeguard his own wife, and bearing a heavy load of useless aims. When he returned to Ayodhya after his exile, and Janaka came to congratulate him, how could he look upon his face and what could he tell him of his dear daughter? Let Lakshmana therefore return alone and inform his mother Kausalya and the rest of his sad fate. Surely, some cruel *rakshasa* had carried her away and perhaps slain her. Was it for this that he had

brought her with him into the forest? Thus did the forlorn husband wail aloud and lament the loss of her whom he loved more than his life. His faithful brother, Lakshmana, gently solaced him and pointed out that it was wiser to set forth at once and search for her diligently, as she could not have been taken away very far, than lose more time in vain lamentations. The *asrama* where they had spent so many happy days, lost all its magic charm and looked desolate to them now, and the two brothers left it and wended their way southwards in search of the priceless treasure they had lost.



XXXI. The Search for Sita.

THE two brothers walked on southwards, searching the forest on either side for any sign or token of the lost Sita. Rama found some flowers lying on the ground which he had given his wife and he again burst out in grief and bewailed his sad fate. A little farther, they came upon a piece of well-trodden ground with confusing foot-marks and other signs, such as clots of blood and broken bits of arms, of a violent struggle having taken place there. Rama thought that some *rakshasas* must have quarrelled over Sita and fought for her there, and was sorely aggrieved at her fate. The Aryans always accused the *rakshasas* of eating

human flesh, and Rama feared that perhaps some cruel foe had devoured her there. He was overwhelmed by sorrow and wailed aloud, bitterly blaming himself first for bringing her into the forest with him, and again for going after the deer foolishly against his brother's warning. Lakshmana soothed him with gentle and wise words

"Grieve not, my brother," said he in a kindly tone, "nor anticipate evil. Let us hope that we shall find her soon and safe, and let us search for her diligently and ceaselessly. This place does indeed seem to have some reference to her, and a little more search may show it more clearly. How often have you not told me that weal and woe are the lot of all mankind, and that no wise man should feel too glad at the one, or too grieved at the other. Take heart, my brother, I pray you, and fret not yourself with such vain grief. Let us search for my sister till we find her, nor waste time in idle and unbecoming sorrow."

The brothers soon came upon Jatayu, who lay bleeding on the ground, and was about to die. He was just able to tell them in a few words how he had met and fought Ravana who was carrying off Sita, and how Lanka's king had mortally wounded him. "I am dying and my eyes roll so and grow dim," added he, "I see before my eyes golden trees with wavy heads,

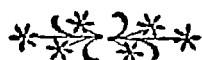
and I know I shall die presently But take heart, O Aryan princes, you shall surely recover her Ravana has taken her in the *vindha muhurtha*, when one who obtains anything will lose it again "

The brothers eagerly asked him to tell them more of Ravana, but Jatayu could not speak any further and died before their eyes. The princes were greatly touched at the faith and devotion of the old man who had so bravely given up his life in their cause. They shed some tears for him, and then burnt the corpse and performed his funeral They then passed on towards the south-west through a thick jungle, and reached the dark and densely wooded Krounchāranya, a distance of three *kios* from Janasthan Walking on for three more *kios* eastwards, they came to Mathangāsrama, where they met Ayomuki, a cruel and wicked *rakshasi*, whose impudence Lakshmana had to punish In the next jungle they came upon Kavandha, a huge, one-eyed and deformed *rakshasa* giant, whose terrible onset made even the brave Lakshmana quail at first But at last, the two brothers got the better of the giant and overcame him Before he died, he requested them to give him a burial, even as Virata had done before They promised this, and then asked him to tell them about Ravana and how they might best recover Sita whom he had carried away

"Ravana is my king," replied Kavandha with his dying breath, "and I may not betray him. But I shall tell you of one who will help you. Westward of these hills and jungle, and down south, there is the large lake, Pampa, whose bank adjoins Mathangavana. In a cave on its slope, now lives Sugriva, the great chief of the Vanara tribe, with only four followers. He too is an exile from his kingdom, and he too has lost his wife, to his brother Vali. I have no doubt that you who have overcome me, will be able to defeat and slay the mighty Vali. Seek the good Sugriva's friendship and help him to regain his wife and his kingdom. The Vanaras are a great and famous race of warriors, and the grateful Sugriva knows the *rakshasas* well and will help you to search for your lost wife and regain her. My life is sinking and I shall die now. I pray you fail not to give me a burial."

'He who performs the last rites to an unclaimed corpse gets great *punnya*,' says an olden proverb; and this was the third which the exiles had to attend to. They followed Kavandha's directions, crossed many a pristine forest, and travelled on, till they reached the western bank of Pampasaras and Mathangavana. They were welcomed there by a great female ascetic, Savari, who entertained them with many luscious and wholesome fruits. We are told that she too gave up her body to the holy fire and passed away.

from this world, even as Sarabhanga had done before. Admiring the beauties of Mathangavana and the lake, the two brothers then went towards the hill, Rishyamuka, in search of the Vanara chief, Sugriva, who lived in hiding there.



XXXII. Sugriva, the Fugitive.

TIME had somewhat softened Rama's grief at the loss of his beloved Sita, but though he was now calm outwardly, he felt no joy in life, and his heart still ached with sharp pain whenever anything brought the old days to his mind. The sight of Pampa lake with pretty birds and flowers, and the beautiful Mathangavana, made him think how glad she would have been to see them, and he once more bewailed his wretched fate, shedding hot, bitter tears. Lakshmana, his brave and faithful brother, again sought to soothe him. "Of what help is such vain grief," said he, "but to break the spirit and unnerve the mind? Now, we know that she is alive, and who has carried her away. It therefore behoves us to seek out that base wretch and recover her, rather than sorrow vainly in this manner. Courage is the root of all strength and success in this world. There is nothing more mighty, nor is there aught impossible to him that has it. Nothing daunts the man of courage, who goes straight to his goal, swerving neither to the right nor to the left. Courage alone can give us back Sita now. Therefore, cheer up, my brother, and shake off this weakness and vain grief."

As the two brothers, fully armed, walked

towards the Rishyamukha hill, Sugriva saw them from his place of hiding. He mistook them for warriors sent by his brother Vali to kill him. He thought they had disguised themselves as hermits in order the better to deceive him, and he was much afraid. But Hanuman, a brave and wise man, who was Sugriva's general and friend, was one of those who look always to the bright side of the shield, and do not fear any evil, unless and until there is good ground to do so. He allayed his master's fears and offered to go forth and meet the two noble-looking strangers, to find out who they were and what brought them to the place. Sugriva gladly agreed, and asked Hanuman to be on his guard and to watch them and their words carefully. So Hanuman came forward and met the brothers at some distance from where Sugriva was.

The Aryan poet has represented Hanuman, Sugriva, and the rest of them as monkeys, same as he speaks of Jatayu as a vulture, and as we shall see later, Jambuvan as a bear, and Jatayu's brother Sampathi as a vulture. I have no doubt that they all belonged to different tribes of Dravidians or other non-Aryans, who perhaps had such devices on their banners, or kept tame monkeys, bears and vultures. We cannot be sure now about it, but certain it is that no monkey, bear or vulture could have ever thought, spoken or acted as they did, and

that they were all only human beings like us, whom the fair-skinned, fine-featured proud Aryans dubbed as beasts and birds. The Vanaia country was probably somewhere about the present Bellary district.

"Noble strangers who seem like *Rajarishis*," said Hanuman after saluting the princes, "what may have brought you here to this remote jungle, thus armed, and so fearful to behold? Who may you be, young, stalwart, handsome, so much alike? Why do you not answer me? I am of the Vanara race, my name Hanuman, and I am the son of Vayu. The great and mighty Sugriva, the head of our race, has sent me to you, and he seeks your friendship. I am his minister I pray you tell me who you are and what you seek here " There was then a little court-scene in the midst of that wild forest Hanuman was looked upon as an ambassador from the King of the Vanaras to the King of the Kosalas, and the latter made signs to his brother to give a proper reply to his message

"Learned sir," said Lakshmana to Hanuman, "we too have heard of the great Sugriva and of his goodness, and we wish to see him "

But Hanuman was no novice in such matters, and he again asked "May I first know, sir, why you have both come into this fearful jungle?"

Rama again nodded to his brother, who then told Hanuman who they were, of their exile, of Sita's kidnapping by a *rakshasa*, of their search for her. and of Kavanda's advising them to seek Sugriva's help. Lakshmana, you may be sure, did not fail to impress deeply on Hanuman's mind Rama's greatness, matchless valour, and heroism.

"It is more meet that my chief should himself go to such great princes as you are," replied the courteous Hanuman, "and it is his good fortune that you seek him instead. He too is an exile here, and his brother Vali has bereft him of both crown and wife. I have no doubt he will highly prize your friendship and help you."

Hanuman then left the princes to inform Sugriva, and they were glad that their visit to the Vanara chief was thus bearing good fruit. They were soon after welcomed by Sugriva himself, who stretched out his hand to Rama in token of faith and friendship, and Rama clasped it gladly. Then Hanuman made a fire, and Rama and Sugriva went round that sacred element reverentially, and pledged their mutual friendship and help before *Agni*. Sugriva's doubts and fears thus removed, they talked freely of their troubles; and Sugriva told Rama his own story and why he was in hiding there. Vali was his elder brother, and became the

chief of the Vanaras on their father's death. Vali had a quarrel over a woman with an *asura* Mayavi, who attacked him one night suddenly. Vali defeated Mayavi and chased him, and Sugriva followed his brother out of the love he bore him. Mayavi ran into a long and deep cave for refuge, and Vali followed him into it, charging Sugriva to guard its mouth. Sugriva waited long, but his brother did not return; and he saw signs and heard sounds which made him think that he had been killed by the *asura*. Sugriva, therefore, closed the mouth of the cave with a large stone, and returned home. Then at the request of the ministers, he allowed himself to be crowned in his brother's stead. But Vali was not dead, and he returned soon, after slaying the *asura*. He was wild with rage against Sugriva for what he deemed as base treachery, and he would take no excuse. Sugriva readily gave back the crown and the kingdom to his elder brother, but Vali was not soothed so easily. He imprisoned his friends and drove Sugriva himself out of the kingdom and far into the jungle, depriving him of his wife too, and he was still seeking his life.

"I have ever since been in hiding here for fear of him," said Sugriva in a woeful tone, "and as long as he is alive, I can have no peace or happiness. It is not for me to praise myself, but time will show the strength and fervour of my

friendship for you. With your help, great warriors, I doubt not that I shall soon slay my brother and regain my wife and crown. And believe me I pray you, once I regain the throne, your troubles will become mine, and I will aid you to the best of my power in seeking out Sita and recovering her. I will not spare the last drop in my veins. Your foes are my foes and your friends my friends, hereafter."

Rama vowed to kill Vali and restore his new-made friend to the Vanara throne.

Thereupon Sugriva was very glad, and promised, in his turn, to help Rama to the utmost. He then told Rama how he and his comrades had one day seen a *rakshasa* carry away a woman, who was struggling on his lap and wailing in grief, and how, on seeing them, she had thrown towards them some jewels tied in a piece of her cloth. Perhaps she was the very woman they had lost and were now seeking.

"Bring me those jewels at once, my friend," exclaimed Rama eagerly.

Sugriva did so, and lo! they were Sita's. Rama's grief, on seeing those jewels of his lost wife, was very great, and he wept and wailed bitterly. He called on his faithful brother Lakshmana to see the armlets and earrings which Sita had thrown down. It was then that the noble Lakshmana said that he knew only her anklets, and not the jewels she wore on her arms.

or ears as he had never looked up at her. Sugriva then consoled Rama's grief and besought him to keep up his courage. He too had lost his dear wife, but he had never allowed grief to overpower him so, or given up hope. It ill became Rama so to despond and moan. A great warrior and learned prince like him should show more fortitude. Thus did the Vanara chieftain soothe and advise his new Aryan friend



XXXIII. The Fall of Vali.

SUGRIVA was now sure of Rama's friendship and help, but he doubted whether he was a match for Vali. Vali, from what we learn, was the strongest man and greatest warrior in all the Deccan, and even the mighty Ravana held him in dread. Sugriva, therefore, told Rama of his doubt, and asked him to show him some proof of his strength and skill in arms. Single-handed and alone, Vali had once grappled with a mad and enraged bison, and slain the huge brute. At another time, he had felled a tree with a single stroke. Was Rama a match for such a man? The prince smiled, and soon gave Sugriva enough proof of his own strength and the force of his arms to clear all his doubts. Sugriva was very glad, and praised his new friend as little less than a God. They then

began to consider ways and means. Sugriva had his own party at Kishkindha, the Vanara capital, but they were few, and would not join him openly as long as Vali was king. He had however no doubt of his being hailed as king by all if Vali were once killed. A handful of men could not of course lay siege to a city, or defy the Vanara army under their mighty leader. He knew that Vali was too honourable a warrior to refuse a single combat when challenged to it by a single foe. Sugriva proposed to call him out for a fight, and wished Rama to hide himself near by and aim one of his deadly and unfailing arrows at his brother while they were fighting. This plan seemed to be as simple as it was sure, and Rama agreed to it.

The next day, Sugriva went forth and challenged his brother Vali to a fight. He had his wish only too soon, and enough of it too. He fled back to his friends and roundly taunted Rama with unfaithfulness to his pledge.

"You and your brother are just like twins," explained Rama, "I could not know you when you were fighting. I was afraid that I might unwittingly kill you and thus commit a heinous sin, slaying the man whom I have vowed to befriend and protect. If you fight your brother again, wearing something on you by which I can know you from your brother, I will surely kill him then. I have passed my word which

I have never yet broken, and besides, as you know well, I rely solely on your help to seek out and recover my wife "

At Rama's bidding, Lakshmana plucked a wild creeper with some flowers on it, and put it round Sugriva's neck like a garland. Sugriva again set off to challenge his brother to another contest. While the two princes were waiting under cover near the scene of combat, Lakshmana, who had till then been silent both out of deference to his brother, and because hitherto they had never been alone together, could contain himself no longer, and said .

"What shame is this, my brother, that we have come to ! Is it not enough that we have to call these barbarous folks our friends and court their friendship ? This Sugriva seeks to slay his own elder brother, and it is a sin even to look on such a man's face Must you also help him in his wickedness in this shameful manner ? I cannot bear this, and my heart is solely agrieved "

"These rude non-Aryan jungle tribes," replied Rama, "are little more than the beasts, among which they live. What law or justice do they know or care for ? And if all who are born brothers be good and true in this world, where would be Bharata's greatness ? Further, it behoves us only to get what good we can from such people Their sins be on their head ; we

cannot possibly set right all that is wrong on this planet ”

Pride of race could not go farther, and the noble Lakshmana said nothing more ; but I am sure that he was far from satisfied.

Vali was in his harem when he heard of his brother's second challenge, and he got up in great wrath His wife Tara, however, besought him not to go then . “ No one would think the less of your valour, my lord, for not taking up this second challenge. Your brother has come back now not out of his own prowess, which has again and again failed to bestead him against you, but only because he has a new and powerful helper now Hear what our son Angadha told me to-day · two great Aryan warriors, sons of the king of Ayodhya, have come into the forest and are Sugriva's friends now. They are both mighty warriors, and have many a deadly weapon unknown to us It is relying on their help that your brother has come again to fight you I therefore pray you, my husband, go you not out now It is not right that you should make a foe of your own brother any longer He is your only brother and your nearest of kin Forgive his fault, I beseech you, make him heir to your throne, and keep him by your side, seeking your welfare in his love and gratitude I am a foolish woman, but I love you dearly I would gladly lay down my life

to save you, and I give you this advice for your own good. Abandon this wrath, against your own brother and make him your friend."

Vali was too angry and proud to take such advice, and he would never refuse a challenge. He assured her that Rama, if he were a righteous prince, would never do him any harm as he had done him none, and he would never aid his brother secretly, if he were a true warrior. So it was an idle tale which their son had heard and told her. He bade her wait a little and not be anxious till he returned in a short while, after defeating his brother. He would not, in deference to her wishes, kill him; but only drive him away.

It was a short tough struggle between the two brothers, but Rama's well-aimed arrow pierced the brave Vali's breast, and he fell down to the ground mortally wounded. Then the two princes went near him. Groaning with pain, Vali asked them who they were and who had shot the fatal arrow, and they told him.

"Are you then the Aryan prince Rama, of whom my good queen told me ere I came here?" said the dying king of the Vanaras, "You are noble-looking and dressed like a hermit, and you say you are the son of an emperor, and of famous and ancient lineage. The more shame to you then that you should thus aim a deadly arrow, secretly against an unarmed man, who

had done you no harm, did not even know you, and who was fighting in single combat with another foe, and for a cause in which you have no part or lot! When my wife warned me against you, I could not believe that a true Aryan warrior and prince would act so basely. I never thought that you were such a deceitful dastard. Son of a king, you have no doubt been taught the right rules of war and honour, the difference between right and wrong. You say that your royal father gave up his life for the sake of truth, and that your brother Bharata would not accept the crown because it was not his by right. And yet son to the one and elder brother to the other though you are, you have now behaved with unspeakable meanness and treachery. For shame, for shame. an utter stranger to you and on the point of death now, I can still blush for your sake. O how foully have you sullied the fair name of your noble father, your even nobler brother, and the great line of your forefathers!"

In his righteous wrath, the brave Vali had almost forgotten his pain, and the burning words fell swift and sharp from his quivering lips. Rama heard the reproof in silence, and then gently replied: "Think not, O Vali, that I shot you thus for any harm that you have done me, or out of enmity. Nor am I angry with you even now for your scoffs and taunts, spoken

out of ignorance, and with your dying breath. I shall now tell you why I acted in this seemingly ignoble manner. I am a Kshattriya and a prince, and it is therefore doubly my duty to set right all wrongs wherever found and to punish all evil-doers. You have possessed yourself of your own brother Sugriva's wife, Uruma, a most wicked sin which it is my duty to punish. Again, you are little more than a beast of the field, and it is the right of all noble Aryans to hunt such as they please. Surely, no hunter is bound to have cause for hatred against his prey, or to fight with his victim openly. Your righteous brother, whose life you were cruelly seeking, sought my refuge, and I pledged my word to rid him of his foe, and he has promised to aid me to recover my lost wife from Ravana. I was therefore bound to help him. These three reasons will prove to you that I am not at all to blame for this act, and that I only did my duty as a Kshattriya, as a prince, and as friend to Sugriva."

Vali was now sinking slowly, but he replied Rama's words with a laugh of scorn. "Having lost your dearly beloved wife, I am afraid, Rama, that your senses have become confused, and you cannot now judge well of what is right and what is wrong. The *rakshasa* king carries away your wife and you secretly murder the king of the Vanaras for it. This is your idea of

Kshattrya duty, of setting right what is wrong and punishing evil-doers! What know you of the quarrel between me and my brother? Who made you judge and executioner? And when did you hear me, the other party in the cause? You are indeed a strange judge to punish without even hearing the accused! Again, and in the same breath, you say you killed me because I am little more than a beast to you. Know you not, Rama, that a beast that knows right from wrong, and that acts according to its conscience is akin to the gods, while any man who has not such an understanding is only a brute? And again, if we, Vanaras, are only so many beasts, how have I committed a crime by taking my brother's wife? Which beasts have such moral codes, or obey such rules as men? Your last word fully shows your folly as well as your short-sightedness. Your father foolishly gave a boon to his wife and then unjustly banished you. You, a worthy son of such a father, foolishly gave refuge to my weak brother first, and have now shot me secretly like a murderer. Think you that Sugriva will ever be able to overcome the mighty Ravana? O purblind man! If you had only told me a word about it, I would have punished the impudent King of Lanka, and recovered your wife for you in a trice. Your foe is like a mighty elephant, and in order to overcome him, you have allied yourself

to a timid hare, instead of with the mighty lion, the noble king of the forests, who alone could help you in your plight. Thus, all your boasted reasons are as flimsy as they are foolish. You are no true warrior or just man, nor do you know even your own good rightly. Doing such a wicked and shameless deed yourself, how dare you blame Ravana for unrighteous conduct? But it is too late and past mending now. Death is the certain fate of all beings, and I am not afraid to die. Not minding my dear queen's timely warning, I have been overcome by fate in this manner, and I die. Had you openly fought me, you had surely died in my place, but there is no use in regretting what is past mending. Send for my brother, my wife, and my son, I pray you, and let me see them before I expire. I was wrong, very wrong, in not forgiving my brother and befriending him as my wife entreated me to do, and I pay for it with my life now. Why blame *you*, an utter stranger and no foe? You have been only a tool in the hands of God, who wanted to punish me for my unbrotherly hatred. May be, Sugriva was after all not to blame, and what he told me was true. Send for him at once, I pray you, and for my queen and my son, and let me see them all once again ere I depart this life."

The bonds of nature are surely stronger than the petty piques and grudges which men

make and plague themselves with in this world, and Sugriva, when he saw his brave brother lying in a pool of blood and gasping for life, was smitten with overwhelming grief and fell down by his side and wailed aloud. Tara and Angadha also came soon, and the Aryan princes could hardly withhold their own tears to see their bitter anguish and hear their heart-rending cries. Vali himself consoled them all, and besought them to stop their sorrowing, and listen to him ere he died, as he felt his life would soon ebb away. He begged Sugriva to forgive him for the grievous wrong he had done him, blinded by pride and rage. He gave him leave to mount the vacant throne, and besought him to look upon his son Angadha as his own son, and cherish him lovingly. He advised him to rule his kingdom justly, and to treat his wife Tara with all honour and listen to her counsel, as she was wise and righteous. Choking with grief and borne down by mortal weakness, he blessed his dear son, Angadha, and bade him to love and obey his uncle Sugriva in all things and be ever truthful and faithful to him. He counselled him to behave evenly always and avoid all relentless hatred and undue friendship. He bade a touching farewell to his loving wife Tara, and then gave up the ghost. Loud and long was the wail raised by the Vanaras and the near kindred of the departed hero, on seeing

his death The bereaved widow and her fatherless son were smitten sorely with grief, and moaned in their agony. Hanuman and Rama comforted them with great difficulty, and then the funeral of Vali took place with all royal pomp After the ceremonies were over, Sugriva was crowned as King of the Vanaras, and Angadha as his heir Faithful to his vow of exile in the forest, Rama would not enter the town of Kishkindha, even for the coronation It was then the rainy season, and no search for Sita could be made for four months more The princes therefore gave leave to Sugriva to look after the affairs of his kingdom, enjoy the pleasures of new-gained royalty, and get him ready for the task after four months They themselves lived in a cave in the forest on a neighbouring hill just outside the city, and awaited the coming of autumn



XXXIV, The Goodness of Tara.

"SWEET is pleasure after pain," sings a poet truly To a child of the sunny South, nothing in nature fills the heart with more joy than rain Sugriva had till now spent many years in wild jungles and lonely caves, suffering much hardship and privation, with fear in his heart which made him quail at every sudden sound and shadow. So he found the power and

pleasure of kingship very soothing and sweet indeed, and he was lost wholly in their enjoyment. His subjects welcomed him gladly from a long and unjust exile, and his wife, Uruma, and the other ladies of his harem, sweetened his life with love and joy. Months passed like days and each day seemed as but an hour to the new king of the Vanaras. He almost forgot the Aryan prince who had given him back his crown and wife and who was pining in grief in a lonely cave in the jungle not very far off, and because he too had lost his wife.

But to Rama, born in the colder North, living in exile in a strange and far off country whose rude folks were little more than beasts to him, and separated from his dearly beloved wife, of whose sad fate or even existence he was not sure, each day was as wearisome and dreary as a whole year, and he was impatient for the ceasing of the depressing rains and for a clear sky beneath which he could renew his search for her. "A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things," and Rama keenly felt the truth of it. He often bemoaned his fate and broke down in tears and grief, and his brave and faithful brother solaced and cheered him, saying that the rains would soon cease and the grateful Sugriva come with his mighty hosts to aid them in their search. The rains did cease at last and the sky cleared up, but no

Sugriva came Rama grew more and more impatient of delay, and Lakshmana could not bear to see his great sorrow. He never loved Sugriva, the betrayer and real slayer of his elder brother. And now, when it became plain that the Vanara chief was lost in base pleasure, and had so soon forgotten to whom he owed his crown and happiness, Lakshmana's wrath knew no bounds, and he said he would go forth and slay the ungrateful wretch, crown Angadha as king in his stead, and then send the Vanaras under him to search for Sita. Rama reminded him that he had pledged his friendship and faith to Sugriva, and that when he erred out of a natural love of pleasure after so much of suffering, it was their duty to rebuke and correct him, rather than punish him so severely. He therefore bade Lakshmana go to Kishkindha and wake up Sugriva from his slothful dream of pleasure, and remind him of his duty to them, and that the time for discharging it had come. Lakshmana went, his eyes flashing fire, and the Vanaras who saw his rage quailed in fear and ran to tell their king of his coming, and of his great wrath. They found Sugriva in his harem, drunk with wine, but when he heard the news, he was smitten with remorse and fear and summoned Hanuman and the rest to his help. He was ashamed of himself and dared not face Lakshmana's wrath.

The mighty chief of the Vanara race need not of course have been afraid of two helpless Aryans, however valorous they might be. But Sugriva was no traitor, and he felt he was in the wrong, that he had been betrayed into what looked like base ingratitude by his love of wine and women. He knew that nothing could more easily disarm rage than a good woman, whose sweet speech acts as oil on troubled waters. He therefore appealed to his brother's wife, the kind-hearted Tara, for help in his sad plight. He had widowed her and orphaned her son, but she knew that her late husband had treated him harshly, and so, when he was now in sore straits, she readily came to his help. Surrounded by her handmaidens and other ladies of the zenana, the bereaved widow laid aside for a while her own great sorrow, and went forward to meet the angry Lakshmana, and allay his wrath. She greeted him in a kindly tone and inquired sweetly and timidly why he looked so enrag'd. Lakshmana was certainly not ready for such an interview. He forgot his wrath, he became bashful and felt queerly, and he stood with downcast eyes, "like one in the midst of his mothers-in-law." With gentle words of soft praise and persuasion, Tara allayed the prince's wrath, and she tactfully urged excuses for the seeming slothfulness and ingratitude of Sugriva. She promised the

utmost diligence on his behalf in the search for Sita, and said that the Vanara hosts had already been summoned by him for that task. A Tamil sage says that the right way to punish those who have done us a wrong is to put them to shame by doing them a great good in return; and thus did the good Vanara queen behave towards her brother-in-law who had killed her dear husband. The wise Hanuman came on the scene presently, with more excuses for his chief and more pledges of better behaviour for the future, and Lakshmana was wholly appeased. Then came Sugriva, with shame and sorrow on his face, but his pardon had already been won by others. And so the meeting, at first a little awkward, became pleasant soon, and plans were made at once for sending out the Vanaras in different directions in search of Sita.

Though it was certain that Ravana had carried her away, it was not known whither he had taken her, or where he kept her. Bands of Vanaras were therefore sent to look for and inquire in all directions; but the strongest and ablest party in charge of Vali's son and heir to the Vanara throne, Angadha, was sent towards the south, in which direction lay Lanka, the stronghold of the Rakshasas. Hanuman, Nila, and a number of other renowned warriors were of this party, and Sugriva, who knew the south

well, advised them about the route they should follow and the dangers they were likely to meet with. Hanuman, the most discreet of the Vanaras, had, from the very beginning, formed a peculiar attachment to Rama, who, in his turn, liked him best and trusted him most among his new friends. Rama therefore specially besought him to be diligent in the search, and also entrusted him with a signet ring to be given to Sita when he found her, and other tokens .



XXXV. Angadha the Dutiful.

AT the end of the month fixed for the task, all the bands, save the one under Angadha which went southwards, returned home with no news of the lost princess. Angadha's party was not more successful, but he would not accept defeat, or return without having performed his task. Day and night, he and his men searched the woods, caves and mountains, and many a wild and dangerous adventure had they in such exciting work. The men were tired and had lost all hope, and the month appointed had long gone by. But Angadha would not return, he cheered them up, he entreated them, and he threatened them by turns. He pointed out the great glory they would gain by finding Sita when all others had failed, and he warned them of the dire punishment which their angry king

would mete out to them if they went back in shame and failure. They might do as they pleased, but he, for one, would not return home, and he would rather lie down where he stood and starve himself to death. Had not their king and the great Aryan princes rested all their hopes on them, and could they have the heart to return defeated and disappoint them? A soldier's duty was to carry out the orders he had received at all costs and at any risk, and naught but death could atone for failure. He was a true soldier and would not return home to face his king and report that he had failed in his task, and he advised them too to do like him and give up their lives rather. Even Hanuman lost hope and advised Angadha to return, but he was firm. Besides his high sense of duty, Angadha was swayed by fear of Sugriva's wrath. He thought that his uncle still bore him a grudge, and that he would punish him severely, if not with death, were he to return without performing his task. Angadha therefore took his failure sorely to heart, and overborne with grief, shame, and fear, he refused all food and sat down deliberately to die. He shed some bitter tears at the thought of his dear mother Tara, and he besought his companions to break the news of his death to her gently, and to solace her. But his comrades were no faithless or selfish cravens; and when

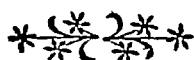
they failed to persuade their chief and prince to return, they too decided to die with him.

It was a strange and sad sight, the noble prince, Angadha, heir to the Vanara throne and son of the mighty and famous hero Vali, seated with his comrades in arms, at the foot of the Vindhya hill and facing the southern ocean,—awaiting calmly and deliberately death by starvation, rather than accept defeat and fail in their duty to their king. Such courage and perseverance, no doubt, deserved a better fate than death, and so it befell that Sampati, elder brother of Jatayu, who was living near by, happened to see them, and asked them what they were doing there. He then heard from them of his brother's death and the reason thereof, which Rama had told them. He was much grieved, and wished to revenge himself on the wicked Ravana who had slain his brother. He had seen the Rakshasa monarch carry a beautiful woman towards Lanka. The lady was unwilling and was struggling, and she had called out the names of Rama and Lakshmana, on seeing him. She was no doubt Sita, and she was kept in Lanka now. This definite news of the object of their quest was like manna to the starving Vanaras, and they thanked and praised Sampati heartily and decided to search for Sita in Lanka.

The rats were afraid of a great big cat who

walked about silently on her velvet paws, and sprang on them suddenly when least expected. They discussed ways and means of escape, and decided at last that if a bell were attached to the cat's neck, they could be safe ever after. But who was to bell the cat? The Vanaras were in a similar plight now. It was easy to say that Sita should be searched for in Lanka, but who was to cross the billows and how was Lanka to be reached? There lay the vast ocean before them, fathomless, boundless and fearful to behold, and all the more so to inland hill-tribes like them. Lanka lay far off, somewhere in the midst of that roaring and restless expanse of waters, and even the stoutest heart among them quailed with fear, and despaired ever to reach the island of the Rakshasas. The brave Angadha thought that he could somehow reach Lanka, but doubted whether he could also manage to return. But his men would not let their chief and prince put himself to such a risk. Hanuman was the only warrior who dared to face the task and to think of ways and means. The Aryan poet, Valmiki, speaks of the Vanaras as monkeys, and of Hanuman as having jumped across the sea to Lanka, which, according to him, was a hundred *yochanas* from the mainland. This, of course, is a feat physically impossible even to a monkey, and must be taken as a mere light of the poet's fancy. Ceylon, at one time

was a part of the mainland of India, joined to it by a narrow piece of land. Part of this isthmus is still to be seen as Adam's Bridge, a ridge of rocks and sand banks, where the water is very shallow, and quite fordable for long distances. Ceylon is only about thirty miles from Rameswaram athwart this ridge, and Valmiki tells us that Rama and his Vanara friends built a dam over it later, and thus crossed over to Lanka. Clever swimmers have been known to swim forty to fifty miles across the deep sea in less than a day, and it should not therefore have been impossible for a brave, daring and resourceful man like Hanuman to cross over the ridge, where the sea was perhaps even shallower in his time. In fact, we know that Rakshasas, men and women, had easy and speedy means of communication between Lanka and the mainland, and to this day, fishermen easily reach the island in a few hours with the help of nothing better than a couple of logs tied together, and an oar or a small sail. We have no means now of knowing for certain how Hanuman actually crossed over, but this we may be sure of, that no man or monkey could ever have jumped across, and that Hanuman did reach Lanka, and also returned safely, before Rama and the Vanaras built the bridge



XXXVI. The Forlorn Captive.

THE word Lanka means an island. Some say that Ceylon is not the island which is spoken by Valmiki as Lanka and as the stronghold of the Rakshasas, and that the Lanka of the *Ramayana* was much farther off and has since been submerged in the sea. I doubt this, and I shall take Ceylon as *the* Lanka until it is proved otherwise. Hanuman found the capital of Ravana a very strong and fortified city, and he was put to much risk in entering it. He wondered whether the Aryan princes and the Vanaras would ever be able to storm or seize it, even if they ever got to Lanka. On going in, Hanuman found it to be a most beautiful, luxurious and civilised city, far excelling any other he had seen before in his life. Stately mansions, decorated with flower-garlands and flags, graced the sides of the broad and well-ordered streets, which resounded with music and dancing, or the chant of hymns and prayers. The people seemed to be very happy indeed, and to enjoy the good things of life in peace and plenty. The palace of Ravana, sparkling with precious metals and stones and furnished in the most luxurious manner, was marvellous to behold, and filled Hanuman with pleasure and admiration. He

hid himself during the day time, and searched for Sita all over the city and in the king's palace at night, taking care not to be seen by others. He managed to enter and go through Ravana's zenana, and saw his many wives and mistresses sleeping in their apartments, in his bed-chamber, or in the drinking hall of the palace. On seeing the chief queen, Mandhodhari, Maya's beautiful daughter, he hesitated for a moment, mistaking her for Sita, but his better sense soon showed him the error.

Not finding Sita anywhere in the palace, Hanuman was troubled in mind and he began to despair. He had reached Lanka, braving great peril and suffering many hardships and hair-breadth escapes. He had counted on being able to help his well-beloved Rama more than any other Vanara, and thus winning his lasting goodwill and friendship. To return fruitless therefore, no better than the rest, was bitter to him, and he could not bear to think of it. Men generally think of God when in trouble or sorrow, and Hanuman prayed fervently for divine help and guidance. Suddenly, a thought struck him. Would Ravana place a rival like Sita in his own zenana, in the midst of his jealous wives? Was it not more likely that he would keep her in one of his pleasure gardens which lay round the city? Hanuman at once ran towards the gardens, and in

the better to explore them, he climbed a lofty tree and looked down from there, when, lo! he saw a small knot of women near a bower at the foot of an *asoka* tree not very far from his perch. Yes, there she was, just as he might have expected to find her. Not in golden palaces, not in the mansions of lust or luxury, not in the shameless drinking halls, could he have found the brave and spotless Aryan princess, Rama's wife and Janaka's daughter. There she sat at the foot of a lonely tree whose very leaves seemed to droop with the burden of her sorrows her sweet sad face resting on her palm, the very picture of despondency and grief. She was surrounded by fearful-looking women with grim and ghastly faces and deformed limbs, the chosen guard set on her by Ravana. To look at her was to know at once that she was Sita and no other. Like a tender plant struggling for life on a rocky soil and with never a drop of rain or other water, like a young fawn beset all round by ravenous wolves was Sita in the midst of her *rakshasi* guards, fearsome ogresses chosen to frighten her into yielding. Her 'imperial-moulded form' was now as once her slender waist, and the matchless splendour of her beauty was now like a supreme master-piece of oil painting begrimed with smoke. Bitter tears coursed down her wan cheeks, and for hours together, her form was as still as death, save for

a heaving sigh or unconscious sob. The threats and entreaties of her guards, she met with in silence. Her thoughts were of the saddest, and after ten long months of weary waiting and disappointment, she had almost given up hope. It was utterly impossible for her ever to escape from her guards and out of the island of Lanka. Long and weary days had she spent, in the expectation of her beloved husband's arrival ; never tired of eagerly looking round on all sides, her heart fluttering wildly at the least sound or sign of anything uncommon. The days had grown to weeks, and the weeks had dragged on to ten long weary months, and yet her lord had not come. Perhaps, she thought, Lakshmana had not met him again at all ; or it may be, they knew nothing of Lanka, and of her being carried away to and kept there. How could they know ? Who could have told them ? Jatayu, no doubt, was dead, and no one else knew of her abduction. She bled inwardly to think that perhaps she would never again meet her beloved husband face to face in this life. Again, Rama, noble and loving brother that he was, was perhaps angry with her for her thoughtless words to Lakshmana, and despised her now as one unworthy of him. Who would attend on her dear lord now and see to his comforts ? What would he do, and to whom would he turn now, when any guest visited him ? Even if he had somehow

learnt of her fate, he would have naturally thought that the wicked Rakshasas would have killed and eaten her up at once, and so he would have given up the idea of recovering her. Or perhaps, his mother and his brothers might have again come to the jungle and taken him home? But no she was sure, on second thoughts, that he would never go back before the fourteen years were fully over. Had some great mishap befallen him then? She recalled the terrible fight with Virata and the Janasthan Rakshasas, and a shudder passed through her whole frame, and her heart stood still for a moment as she thought of her husband's possible death. Good God! It was something she could not bear to think of even for a moment. Her dear husband's noble and handsome features, his beautiful and charming eyes, his lordly gait and winning manners were ever present before her inward vision, and his sweet words of love and affection were ever ringing in her ears, and she dwelt on them long and dotingly in her mind. They were her greatest treasure, her only solace now, and she cherished them and revelled in thinking of them as a miser guards and counts his gold coins. She passed in review the many happy days she had spent in his company from the time on which she first saw him, she recalled to mind many a pleasant

and amusing incident in their wedded life, and her sad face lit up with a passing beam of pleasure. But it was only like a flash of lightning on a dark and stormy night, and the ceaseless dread and danger of her present state and its utter hopelessness again plunged her heart in gloom and she wept bitterly. She thought of her lord's matchless heroism and of the deadly weapons in his possession. She thought also of his deep and abiding love for her, a feeling, of which she was as certain as of her own heart's towards him. Yet had he not come, though ten months had gone by, and she was faint with grief and despair.

Trijata, an old Rakshasi, was the only one of her guards who had any sympathy for the forlorn captive and her sad and cruel lot. She had dreamt a dream which foreboded great and speedy good luck to the Aryan princess and death and destruction to Ravana and his hosts. She told her dream and sought to cheer up Sita, and she advised her comrades not to worry her and add to her sorrows.



XXXVII The Midnight Visitor.

HANUMAN was witnessing all this from his perch on the tree when, suddenly many lights approached the spot where Sita was sitting, and the King of Lanka himself came there with a number of female attendants. Hanuman had rejoiced in his heart to see Sita alone and under guard, and apparently pining for her lord,—thus he felt sure of her faithfulness and chastity. Why did Ravana visit her then, and at such an hour? The noble Vanara's heart was tossed with doubts and fears for a few moments, till he learnt the truth.

On seeing Ravana, Sita trembled like a doe at the approach of the tiger, and shrank from him in fear. Her guards retired to a distance on seeing their king, who, bidding his attendants to stay behind, neared the *asoka* tree under which she sat, his heart burning with passion. He pleaded his love humbly and ardently, like a lowly knight before his royal lady-love. He offered her his crown and throne, he offered to make his queen and other wives, Rama and Lakshmana, since they had not come so long, must have died of grief or returned to Ayodhya. How could they ever know of and reach Lanka, or hope to overcome him and his *rakshasa* army, dreaded by the mightiest of the

earth? It was vain, it was foolish of her to hope for their coming still, to pine for her weak and exiled husband. He loved her deeply, madly, as no other man ever loved woman, and he could no longer bear the torments of his ungratified passion. He found no pleasure in the luxury of his palace; food and sleep had become distasteful to him. Love for her was wasting him slowly, robbing life of all its joy. He therefore begged her to be reasonable, to take pity on him, to put an end to the suspense which was killing him. He argued, he pleaded, he threatened, and he cajoled by turns; and at last, forgetting all his pride and high estate in the frenzy of his passion, he fell down at her feet and begged for her love in the most abject manner.

Hanuman's heart was already glad, and Sita's answer gladdened it still more. She despised Ravana and his love, because she was already the wife of another. Alive or dead, she was Rama's own, and it was a sin for any one else to covet her. As for the crown and the throne, her dear lord had thrown away a far greater prize, rightly his own, for the sake of Truth, she held them mere worthless baubles. She taunted him again with fear and cowardice for stealing her away like a thief. She pleaded the cause of morality and righteousness, and besought him to restore her to her husband. She also warned

him of her lord's heroism and matchless skill in arms, that even Ravana and his boasted hosts would surely fall a prey to his unfailing, deadly arrows, even as Kara and his followers had fallen, if he did not take her back to Rama at once and seek his forgiveness. "She that has chastity is clad in complete steel," says Milton, and that mighty armour and the righteousness of her cause gave Sita courage to withstand and defy the *rakshasa* monarch, alone and helpless though she was. Taunted and foiled, Ravana was overwhelmed with rage and rushed towards her, threatening to slay her at once. But still, his deep love for her, and the very justice of her words and her noble bravery, stayed his hands; and he went away in helpless anger and disappointment, threatening finally that he would slay her if she did not yield in two months more, and warning her guards to bend her to his will somehow within that time.

The lordly lion having thus abandoned his prey, the jackals and vultures set to work. One frightful ogress after another of her guards, took upon herself to persuade Sita, by advice and by threats. They spoke to her with all a woman's tact and guile, they pestered her with their coarse jests and gibes, they threatened her with all manner of pains and tortures, if she did not yield. But she was firm, nor did she waste many words on them. Tired of watching and

preaching, and overcome by the meat and liquor which they had gorged themselves with, they then lay down one by one, and were soon all wrapped in heavy slumber.

Left to herself, Sita wept bitterly and long, and bemoaned her fate. She began to consider seriously the wisdom of living thus any longer. She had borne with life for ten dreadful wearisome months in the hope of seeing her beloved lord again, of being released from her shameful confinement. What hope was there of it now? And even if he did come at last and release her, would he, the pure and high-souled Aryan prince, deign to look upon her again, to take her back as his true and loyal wife, after she had remained in the power of the *rakshasas* so long? If he forbade her to touch his hand or cross his threshold, how could she prove her innocence to him? She had first sent her husband away after a deer, then she had forced his faithful brother to leave her, and then she had gone to Lanka with Ravana. Who would ever believe in her innocence in the face of such facts? What other Aryan woman, in olden legend or story, was ever known to have lived so long in the land of the foe, separated from her husband? Another man than her dear lord had coveted her, had touched and carried her away, had spoken such passionate words of love in her ears, yet had she not killed herself,

yet had she not wiped off the shameful blot on her fair name and on the name of her family her death: no *rakshasi* surely, could be wicked! Her noble husband must have abandoned her because she had entered an man's house; and even if, for the sake own honour, he ever fought for and re he would certainly not take her back into his house. How could she bear to with him, and be pointed at by the spotless wives of the Aryan sages and as the woman who had lived so long and in the land of their foes? The very was unbearable, and death was the only left to her now. It was indeed a true that death never comes to one ere the days are over. Why else had she long ago, separated from her beloved and suffering such troubles at the her cruel guards and wicked pe. She had never thought she could live from Rama even for a day. Again, it certain that the passionate Ravana either force her to his will, or slay her wrath after two months. Death was her sole refuge and help. It mad heart bleed to think that all her wifely tion and righteous conduct were in vain, evil was after all to triumph over good, she was to see the face of her beloved lor

more on this earth. But she felt such regrets were vain, and she determined to put an end to her miserable life at once. Her guards were all sound asleep, and so there was no one to hinder her. She thought of making a noose of her long plaited hair round her neck, and then hanging herself by it from the branch of a tree. Firm in this resolve, and with her heart full of a wild yearning for a last look at her beloved Rama's face, she got up and walked towards the tree on which Hanuman was sitting, as it had a low branch fit for her purpose, and was far enough from where her guards slept to escape notice.



XXXVIII. Hanuman and Sita.

HANUMAN saw that the time had come when he could make himself known to her unseen by her guards, and he came down from his perch on the tree, gently uttering Rama's name and speaking of him. Sita was at first scared and frightened, and thought that it was perhaps a ruse of the wily Ravana who had disguised himself so. On reaching the ground, Hanuman saluted her with joined palms, and said that he was a messenger from Rama who had sent out many like him to search for her. But it had pleased God to enable him alone to find her, such was his great good luck.

"Rama knows not," continued he, "that you are here, or he would have fought the *rukshasas* and recovered you long ago. Doubt not my words, saintly lady, or think otherwise. I bear a sign and a message from Rama, and I shall soon prove to you my truthfulness." On hearing these words, Sita felt like one who, drowning hopelessly, had just caught a rope thrown from a rescue-boat, and her heart leaped with joy. Her doubts were far from cleared, but there stood the man before her, who had just saved her from a foul and ignoble death, speaking of her dear lord, and with truth ringing in every one of his gentle and artless words. His great pity for her sad state, and admiration for her behaviour towards Ravana, which he had no doubt witnessed, were plain to her, and she gently asked him. "Brave sir, who may you be?"

Hanuman then told her of Rama's friendship with Sugriva, the great help he had given to the Vanara chief, and of the search of the Vanaras for her. Nor did he fail to gladden her sad heart with an account of how Rama was pining for her night and day. To remove her doubts completely, he reminded her of certain incidents which Rama had told him for the very purpose; how when Rama had asked her to stay behind at Ayodhya on account of the hardships of exile in the

jungle, she had become angry and stood ready by his side to go to the jungle, at once, and how she had naively asked whether the jungle had been reached, as soon as they had got out of the city. Then he gave Rama's signet ring into her hands, and she fondly pressed it to her eyes and kissed it, and burst into tears. There was no room for any more doubt, and great was her joy on seeing such proof of her lord's safety and his love for her. In the fulness of her happiness, she thanked and blessed Hanuman from the bottom of her heart and called him her best friend and greatest benefactor in the world. She praised his courage and heroism in crossing the ocean and eluding the watchfulness of the *rakshasas* and again thanked him for braving such dangers for her. Hanuman then told her in detail all that had happened to the Aryan princes after her abduction, as he had heard it from them. Hearing of the great Vanaras who were now the sworn friends of her husband and pledged to his help, and beholding an example of their bravery and strength in the man who stood before her, Sita felt sure that her release would now be speedy.

Indeed, Hanuman asked her to go back with him at once and offered to take her safe to her lord. It would ill become him, he said, not to return with her to her eager and sorrowing lord, to go back and report merely that he had

seen her. But Sita refused this for more than one reason

"I doubt not, brave sir," replied she, "your courage or ability to take me back with you; but it would be too great a risk. Further, Ravana stole and brought me here like a foul thief, and it would be a blot on my heroic husband's fair name, if we too act so. I have borne with life so long in the hope of a fair deliverance by my lord, firmly believing that righteousness will always conquer evil in the end. Vibhishana's daughter, my only friend in exile here, has told me that the wicked Ravana will not dare to force me to his will, because he is under a curse that his head would burst if he forced any unwilling woman. Safe in that knowledge, and determined to kill myself if he dared to touch me, I have patiently passed these wearisome months, eagerly expecting my lord's coming. It would also ill become a woman to travel alone with another man. Nor will my sorrowing heart ever be comforted." continued the brave Kshattrya princess, "until my wicked abductor falls on the bloody field of battle, and I see the vultures and the crows peck at his accursed eyes which coveted me. My lord should also see me here in the state in which I abide in this land of the foes, and be convinced of my innocence."

Hanuman saw that what she said was right

and prepared to depart. He asked her what message he was to bear to her husband. "Tell him to come at once and deliver me," said she, her eyes streaming with tears "I can bear this cruel separation no longer. I shall surely kill myself if he does not come before the year is out. Tell him, that I vowed this in his name. Even if I am not a wife worthy of him, even if he has no pity for me, let him at least deliver me for the sake of his own honour. Remind him of the sacred vow he took on the day he first touched me, that he would not even think of another woman in this birth. Wretched that I am, it was not my good fortune to see him sit encrowned in state on his ancestral throne and rule the land. But assure him of this, that though I die here in this miserable state, I shall with my last breath pray the Gods to become his wife again in my next birth, to live more happily with him. And tell his faithful brother Lakshmana, that I was left in his charge by my husband, and that it therefore specially behoves on him to hasten my deliverance. Who can conquer Fate? Mighty and heroic are my husband and his brother and truly pure and devoted am I as a wife. Yet do we suffer thus, separated even in exile, and might prevails over right, at least for a time. But warn my husband, I pray you, if he does not come within two months and before the

Hanuman and

year is out, I shall surely be slain and he may then perform my holy Ganges."

"What wild words are these, Hanuman, trying to cheer her?"

"Be sure, lady, that the noble will be here long before the year in the vast hosts of the Vanaras and the

So vast are these hosts that the very sea be dried up if each warrior took up and handful of water. Away with such doubt.

fear henceforth, I pray you, and hope to see Rakshasas overcome and slain, and this raised to the ground and burnt ere long.

not that Evil will ever triumph over Right, that you will have to die here ignobly. I ha

only to go back and tell him, and then there will not be the least delay. I shall truly tell him

all that you have told me, and of your great grief. But tell me, or give me something, I pray you, which will be a proof to him that I have seen and spoken to you, and let me depart before your guards awake and see me."

"Remind him then," said Sita, wiping her tears and taking hope and courage from his words, "of how, when we were once sitting alone in a shady spot on the bank of the Mandhahini river, a crow came flying about and teasing me, and he aimed an arrow at it and blinded it in one eye. Yes, he could not bear

to see even a crow annoy me, and now, I am plunged in such misery and suffering here. But I must have patience a little longer, and then I hope all will be well as you say. Remind him also of how, when I once asked him to suggest a name for a favourite parrot, he suggested the name of his step-mother 'Kaikeyi; and give him this jewel, which will surely remind him of me, of my mother, and of his father King Dasaratha "

So saying, she took out a jewel which was tied in a corner of her cloth, and gave it to Hanuman. She besought him again and again to hasten her deliverance, and told him that she relied wholly on him, and on how he gave her message and described her sufferings to her husband, for her relief. Hanuman again consoled her, promising very speedy deliverance, begged her to bear up for a few weeks longer, and took leave of her, gladdened by her overflowing gratitude and blessed by her prayers for his safe return.



XXXIX Hanuman advises Ravana.

ON leaving Sita, Hanuman began to consider what he should do next. He seems to have thought that if Ravana could be made by fair means to part with Sita, it was his duty to do so. War was always a doubtful and bloody

game, and one should be fair even to a foe. The might and prowess of the *rakshasas*, the noble bearing of their king, and the difficulty of reaching their island-home seem to have inclined him to wish for an interview with Ravana. On the next morning, therefore, he wilfully did some mischief in Ravana's pleasure-gardens, and fought with and drove away the gardeners who met him. News of this was at once taken to the palace, and some of Ravana's sons and others came to see who the daring intruder was. In the fight that ensued, a son of Ravana, by name Aksha, was killed, but Hanuman was soon overpowered by Indrajit, and taken before Ravana.

The Rakshasa monarch sat on a dazzling golden throne. He was dressed in rich silk and wore priceless gems. Beautiful damsels stood on either side and behind the throne, fanning him and otherwise attending on him, and his trusted ministers and kinsmen stood in front of him. On seeing Hanuman, and hearing what he had done, Ravana was very wroth, and he bade his minister Brihastha to demand who he was and why he had behaved so.

"Fear not, O stranger," said the minister addressing Hanuman, "nor tremble for thy life. Who sent thee here and why? Speak not aught but the truth, and no harm shall befall thee, but if thou seekest to deceive, deem thy-

self a dead man. Was it Kubera or Indra who sent thee to this city? Speak "

"I come not from your brother Kubera, nor from Indra," replied Hanuman boldly, addressing himself to Ravana, "and I shall tell you naught but the truth I am a Vanara and of Sugriva's court The brave Aryan prince Rama has killed the mighty Vali,—you know Vali of old to your cost, O king of Lanka,—and Sugriva reigns in his stead now And I came here in search of Sita, whom you have foully carried off and hidden here "

"But why didst thou fight the guards and kill the prince?" demanded Ravana.

"I fought the guards because I wished to see you for whom I have a particular message. When the princes and others set upon me, I fought in self-defence, and some of them were killed I am not to blame for it "

"And what is thy message?" demanded Ravana

"Listen, O mighty monarch," replied Hanuman, "for it touches you closely : Sugriva, my king, greets you and warns you to beware of how you act unrighteously You are no fool or craven; few of the crowned heads on earth have more learning than yours You know well that howsoever Evil may seem to triumph for a while, there is a righteous Heaven above us, and Good will always conquer in the end.

It ill befits you therefore to steal away and keep here in confinement another man's wife. It is the worst of sins, and the one that sullies a fair name and shames a hero more than anything else. Little do you reckon that you keep not Rama's wife in captivity in yonder garden, but a fatal spark that will burn you and all your mighty hosts and this fair city into one mass of ruin, in God's good time. Think not of her as a dear, or pleasant object, but as a plague or a poison to destroy you and yours for evermore. Now that I have found her, the Aryan princes, most puissant of warriors and having such matchless weapons, will soon be here at your gates, with Sugriva's valiant hosts; and remember, God will be only on the side of the righteous. I therefore beseech you, give up Sita and let her return with me to her husband. What pleasure or honour can there be in your thus coveting a woman who hates and despises you? Many and beauteous are your wives, O mighty monarch, and I wish you to remember that lust has ruined more men, otherwise good and great, than aught else in this world."

Great was Ravana's wrath on hearing this plain and unvarnished speech, all the greater because every word of it went straight to his heart and stung him, and he at once bade some warriors to take away Hanuman and slay him. "Heaven forbid!" said Vibhishana, on hear-

ing his brother's mandate, "have some patience, my great and mighty brother, nor seek to kill a messenger. It is considered the deadliest of sins, and you know it."

"Is he not my foe? Has he not trespassed into my city and wantonly killed my son and other warriors? Has not a king the right to slay his foeman and a murderer?" demanded Ravana angrily.

"True he has wantonly done this and he is our foe," pleaded the wily Vibhishana, "but remember he is still an envoy, and sacred is an envoy's life. It ill becomes your high estate and fame to visit your just wrath on a mere servant, a tool, for he is no better. Sugriva and the Aryan princes are your true foemen, worthy of your steel, not this helpless Vanara servant of theirs. And if you kill this man now, they will never hear of you and of Sita being here, and our own people and others will jeer at you, saying that you slew him afraid of a war with them. Branding mutilation, whipping, and deforming are the punishments laid down for a misbehaving envoy, and you may well visit him with any of these and thus teach him better manners. It will also give a foretaste to your enemies of the reception they are likely to get here."

"Well hast thou spoken, my brother, and I thank thee for thy timely advice," said the fickle-minded Ravana. "Here, brand this

Vanara well below his back, and cast him out of the city."

Hanuman was accordingly taken out and branded, but he skilfully managed to set fire to some houses with the very firebrands they brought to brand him with, and in the confusion and panic that ensued, he escaped out of the city. Speaking of Hanuman as a monkey, Valmiki says that his tail was set fire to and that he burnt some parts of Lanka by waving the burning tail on all sides

The reader will hear more of Vibhishana later on. But some points about him and his doings may be noted here. It was his daughter, sent by his wife and at his instance no doubt, who informed Sita of Ravana's curse against forcing an unwilling woman, and you may be sure that friendly communications were secretly kept up between Vibhishana's family and the Aryan princess whom his royal brother had decoyed and kept captive. From the point of view of the *rakshasas*, who were all loyal to their king, he was clearly a traitor in their midst, unknown and unsuspected still. He seems in fact to have been a second Sugriva, but with less reason, and he showed more of venom and far-sighted cunning. Sugriva was himself against his being taken into Rama's friendship, as you will see later on.



XL. The Return of Hanuman.

GREAT was the joy of Angadha and his party, who were waiting anxiously at the seashore, when Hanuman came back to them with the gladsome news. They at once set forth towards Kishkindha, rejoicing in their great good luck, and feasting and drinking on the way. To Sugriva they sent in advance the tidings of their success and return home in a characteristic manner. Near to the Vanara capital was a great garden of fruit trees and palms, belonging to the king, and set apart for drawing toddy, and for growing fruits for the royal palace. Angadha and his followers entered that garden, helped themselves plentifully to the luscious fruits and to their favourite drink, and beat the guards who tried to prevent them. They not only ate and drank till they were filled, but also damaged the trees and threw about the fruits in their riotous joy. The headman of the gardeners went to the palace and complained to the king. Sugriva then knew that the men sent southwards in search of Sita were returning, and that they had found her. He informed Lakshmana, who was with him at the time, and sent back the gardener to hasten Angadha's party to the palace. The gardener duly carried the king's message to Angadha, who thereupon resumed his homeward journey. The Vanaras shouted

The Return of Hanuman.

and made a great noise on nearing the Angadha and Hanuman were the first to the king, who was seated with Rama Lakshmana, awaiting them eagerly. If the proud privilege of Hanuman to break glad some news, and assure Rama of safety and innocence Hanuman then related to Rama in detail how he reached Lanka found Sita, in what state and place he found her; of Ravana's midnight visit and her treatment of him, of his own conversation with her and her message to her husband, as well as the incidents she mentioned about the crow and the parrot, and also of his later interview with Ravana. He then gave Rama the jewel which Sita had sent as a token, and Rama was so much affected on seeing it as Sita was on getting his ring. Hanuman described eloquently Sita's great sorrow and suffering, affirmed that she would be certainly slain by Ravana or kill herself, if she was not released in two months, and besought Rama to set forth at once towards Lanka. Rama heartily embraced the brave Vanara, who had done him such signal service at the risk of his own life, and warmly thanked and praised him again and again. Rama was most eager to start at once for Lanka, but his heart sank when he thought of the ocean to be crossed and of the strength and impregnability of the rakshasa capital, as

described by Hanuman. Sugriva then cheered him up, and said that a causeway to Lanka could be easily made for the army to cross over, and that he and his Vanara warriors 'would help him to their utmost to overcome the *rakshasas*. Orders were given at once for all the Vanara hosts to get ready for the invasion of Lanka, and an early day fixed for their starting.

To such as are inclined to think that Lanka was other than Ceylon, I have a word to say here from what Valmiki himself tells us. Sita wished and expected Rama to reach Lanka within a month or two, though she well knew that Hanuman had first to return to him to Kishkindha, and that he had then to get his Vanara friends ready, reach the seashore, bridge the sea, and cross over with a huge army. She did not expect either Rama, or his Vanara friends to be able to jump across like Hanuman. If Lanka be not Ceylon, but an island eight hundred miles off the mainland of India, would she have expected such an utterly impossible feat, or would Hanuman have promised its fulfilment, when Sita's very life depended upon it?



XLI. The Council in Lanka

WITH music and martial pomp, with joy and laughter, with hope in their h
 joy on their faces, the mighty host
 Vanaras under Sugriva and that of the
 under Jambuvan, all born fighters delio
 the game of war, marched towards the
 ocean Gratitude and affection for th
 princes urged them on; nor was
 wanting towards the mischievous island
 were their natural foes Rama warned
 to beware of ambushes on their march,
 choose a route where they could get pl
 eat and drink, and walk under the sh
 trees. At last they reached the shores of
 sea, and beheld, many of them for the
 time in their lives, the endless expanse of
 dark blue ocean, whose waves dashed an
 on the sandy beach Encamping under the
 of trees, and within sight of the restless bill
 the leaders among them began to consider
 best they could cross over to the island of
 foe

Meanwhile news had reached Ravana of the
 invading army, and he summoned a council of
 his kinsmen, ministers, and generals H
 captains and councillors praised his mighty
 prowess and world-wide fame, belittled the

invaders, and declared for immediate war. They boasted of their own valour and skill in arms, and offered to attack these new enemies at once, and drive them away, or slay them. Ravana was greatly pleased, and vaunted that Sita had agreed to accept his love if she were not rescued by her husband within the year. Then he turned to his brother, the giant Kumbhakarna, and asked him what he advised.

This Kumbhakarna, we are told, was verily a man-mountain, so huge was he and so strong. Ordinary warriors fled in panic at the very sight of his monstrous form and features. We are told that early in life he did severe penance to attain *nityatwam*, or immortality, but when God appeared before him and bade him name his wish, his tongue tripped and he asked for *nidratwam*, or sleepiness instead, which was at once granted. So he was a great sleeper, and as he had an incredible appetite spent his days in gorging himself with fabulously large quantities of meat and drink, and his nights in sleeping it off; yet, withal, he was a lovable man, as you will see, and the heart within that giant form was of pure gold. On being called upon by his elder brother to speak out his mind, Kumbhakarna replied —

“ Too late in the day do you seek advice, my brother and king, for what you have done cannot be undone now. You have committed

“a most shameful and sinful deed, and the bitter fruit of it we have to eat. There is no Rakshasa more learned than you, no one wiser. Yet have you coveted and stolen another’s wife, and you never consulted us before doing such a deed of lasting shame and infamy to our race. The king of Lanka is a mighty and renowned monarch, yet does he feel no shame in humbly laying his crowned head at the feet of an Aryan woman who spurns his sinful love, and scoffs at his power and fame. Alas, what a pass have the Rakshasas come to now! We yearn for deathless fame and universal dominion; we never tire of boasting of our peerless honour and valour yet do we covet and steal other men’s wives, and we are threatened at our very doors by Aryan hermits and South Indian savages. O, what a mean and shameful deed have you done, my king, , and I see, alas, that you are as blinded by lust as ever, and repent not in the least! What else can we do now, but either send back the woman at once to her husband, or face the foe and fight to the bitter end ”

“Never will I agree to part with the fair Sita,” exclaimed the love-sick Ravana, “but your other suggestion is indeed good, my brother, and I shall march against the impudent Aryans and their barbarous comrades and send them to the abode of Death, or back to their native jungles. Get my forces ready!”

"It ill becomes my mighty and renowned father, the great king of the Rakshasas, to march in person against such petty foemen," said Indrajit, the eldest and most valiant of Ravana's sons "It would be honouring the enemy too highly. In vain do all these warriors and myself bear his arms and eat his salt if the king of Lanka has to soil his aims with the blood of such rabble I pray you give me leave, my father, and I shall go forth this instant and slay the puny invaders, and return in a trice to salute your feet"

"It ill becomes *thee*, vain and self-willed boy," cried Vibhishana, rebuking his nephew sternly, "to speak in this assembly, or to advise thy father in such a grave matter Thou hast neither age, nor learning, nor wisdom for the task Think not meanly of your foe, O my brother and king," continued he, turning to Ravana, "or dream that evil will ever prevail over good You are not keeping captive Rama's wife, but a fatal spark of fire which will soon burn up the whole Rakshasa race and this fair kingdom Rama and Lakshmana are matchless in prowess and skill of arms, and I warn you, forget not the fate of Virata, Kara, Dhushana, and others at Janasthan You know your own weakness, and so is it that you went during the absence of the Aryan princes and brought away Sita stealthily. Nor are the Vanaras to be despised

in any way. Remember that Vali was a Vanara, and that even he, so dreaded by you, was slain by Rama; remember also what great havoc Hanuman, a single Vanara warrior, committed here in the very heart of your city. Nor forget that God will ever be on the side of Right only. I therefore warn you, submit ere it is too late, take back Sita to her husband and seek his forgiveness for what you have done. He is a noble prince, and will, no doubt, grant you pardon and peace."

This speech enraged Ravana beyond measure, and he laughed loud in scorn and taunted his brother with treachery and cowardice. "A brother's envy is indeed, proverbial throughout the world," cried he, "and I see a proof of it in thee now. Thou gloatest inwardly because of this trouble to me, and thou seekest to belittle and degrade me before every one. The treacherous kinsman is more to be dreaded than the open foe however mighty, for one can always be on guard against the latter, but not against treason in false kinsmen. So does the wild elephant dread more the treachery of its own kind than the skill or arms of its captors. Thou art envious of my power and state, and feigning to be a saintly and righteous personage, thou seekest to raise thyself upon my ruin. Thou art my brother, or I would slay thee for a false, ignoble traitor even now. Fear not for thy life,

white-livered craven, nor think that I shall ever expect thee to fight for me in the coming struggle. Begone from my sight, toward and traitor, and provoke not my just wrath any longer. I might have known thee, even on the day when thou did'st plead cunningly for the Vanara envoy,"

"You are my elder brother and king," replied Vibhishana, "and I may not resent your words. You will find many to praise you, and say only that which is pleasing to you; but the real friend, who will speak out the unpleasant truth, is indeed rare, and so also is the king who will listen to such advice and act upon it. Forgive me for what I have spoken for your own good. I go now, and I shall vex you no more."

With these words Vibhishana left the council, which broke up soon after



XLII. Deserters and Spies.

THEN Vibhishana with four followers went to the enemy's camp on the mainland, and sought an interview with Rama. Sugriva, Lakshmana, and some others would have none of him, and begged Rama not to befriend such a traitor. They not only despised him, but doubted his faith. How could such a man be ever trusted, said they? But the shrewd Hanuman, who already owed his life to Vibhishana's

pleading with Ravana, surmised that the deserter was sincere in seeking Rama's refuge. He also pointed out that Vibhishana sought Rama's help now, because Rama had killed Vali and placed Vali's younger brother on the Vanara throne, seeking such a fortune for himself.

Now Rama was no doubt strictly honest and righteous; but to the world at large, he did not apply such a high standard. Nor was he unwilling to profit by the badness of other men whom he could not mend. Above all, he was very shrewd, and knew that Vibhishana's help would be priceless to him in the impending struggle. If he was deserting through treachery and selfishness, why, it was his own business, and he was no child or fool. So Rama readily welcomed him, promised him the Rakshasa throne, and had him anointed at once as Lanka's future monarch.

Then they considered together how to cross over to Lanka, and Vibhishana advised that the help of the Chief of the Boatmen, who is spoken of by Valmiki as the presiding Deity or Lord of the Ocean, should be obtained. The Chief of the Boatmen was not at first willing, perhaps he was afraid of Ravana's wrath. But they threatened and cajoled him, and at last they got his help by putting down a pirate who was his enemy. The Chief could get them thousands

of small boats, but it would be risky and tedious to transport a large army in such small vessels. On his advice therefore, it was decided to put up a sort of temporary causeway to Lanka. The rocks and shallow line of reefs made the sea fordable in many places and for long distances; and where it was not so, the depths were filled up, or the boats were perhaps turned into floating-bridges by being tied together with ropes and stakes. This work was undertaken and completed by Nala, a Vanara engineer; when lo! a narrow causeway in the midst of the dark billows soon shone like the line which, on the head of a woman, divides her thick dark hair on either side. The army then crossed over with much noise, no doubt, there were many accidents, but let us hope there was not much loss of life. On reaching the island Rama saw the city of Lanka on the crest of a hill, shining like a beautiful diadem. Within its walls was pining in cruel bondage she whom he loved best in the world, who was dearer to him than life itself. So he was not unwilling to get her back without a doubtful war, if possible. He therefore set free Suka, a spy sent by Ravana and caught by the Vanaras with Vibhishana's help, to return to Lanka and inform the king of his landing. Now on hearing that the invaders were marching towards the city, Ravana sent two of his ministers in disguise, to espy and

report to him their strength and movements. Vibhishana again helped to discover these spies too, and wanted to kill them, so they were brought, before Rama. Note how Rama dealt with them. He had already in his camp, one great Rakshasa deserter, the king's own brother, who said that he had deserted because of Ravana's unrighteousness. Here was a good chance to win over more Rakshasas, or at any rate to impress them with his own goodness and nobleness. "If you have espied us and our army well and done your king's bidding," said Rama to the trembling ministers, "you may return to your city. If you wish to see more, do so by all means. Fear not for your lives because we are your foes. we never harm unarmed persons or envoys. Go back safe and fearless, and tell your king to put to the proof on the morrow, the strength and valour whereon he relied when he basely stole another man's wife. For we shall attack him at daybreak, let him beware!"

"May you be victorious!" exclaimed the astonished spies, and they returned to Ravana, to praise Rama's greatness and nobility. They spoke highly of the strength and prowess of the invading hosts, and entreated Ravana to send back Sita at once, and seek peace. Ravana put down what they said to fear, and mounting to the top of his stately palace, he learnt from them the different encampments of the enemy.

on the slope and at the foot of the hill. After pointing out the various camps and extolling the fame of the several commanders to their king, the two ministers again urged him to seek peace. But he grew angry, and dismissed them from his presence as ungrateful cowards. He then sent for other spies, and sent them to the enemy's camp to find out more minutely his actual strength, disposition, and defences. These disguised spies were also discovered by the watchful Vibhishana, and one of them was captured. The Vanaras tortured the man, and would have killed him, but Rama again intervened and set him free, thus winning one more Rakshasa to his cause. This spy returned to Ravana and related his adventures in the hostile camp which, he said, was as mighty as it was hard to be espied. He too praised Rama highly, and besought his king to set free Sita at once, or at least, if he must fight, to make war without further delay.



XLIII. Ravana's Love and Pride.

WITH the mighty hosts of the enemy at his very doors, the thoughts of Ravana still turned only towards the Aryan princess who was pining for her wedded lord in the *asoka* grove. The more he was urged by his spies, ministers, and kinsmen to send her back and

seek peace, the more he longed to seat her, were it but for a day, by his side on his throne, and call her his own, ere he went forth to throw his dice at the game of war, staking his crown, his kingdom, and his very life. But now, when there was no time to lose, he stooped once again to deceit, in order the more surely to win her love if possible, for this he sought the aid of Vidhy-ujjiva, a skilled Rakshasa.

Ravana then betook himself to the *asoka* grove, and he once again laid his crowned head at Sita's feet, pleading his love in the most passionate words. She who had spurned him with bitter scorn even in the depth of her despondency, was not likely to hear him with favour now, when her beloved and heroic lord was at his gate, with a vast and powerful army for her deliverance. "I have killed him," said Ravana falsely, "even Rama for whose sake you will not accept my love. He and his Vanara hosts were sleeping in their camp last night when my warriors fell upon them suddenly and destroyed them. My general, Prahastha, cut off the sleeping Rama's head with a sweep of his sword, and you need therefore pine no more for your husband, or expect him to redeem you. Come now, dry those unseemly tears, waste no more time in foolish and vain grief, be mine, and become at once the empress of my heart and of all my harem. Yield, and torture me no more.

What ! Do you still weep and refuse to accept my love, O Princess as beautiful as you are heartless ? Perhaps, you doubt my words ; but I can prove their truth to you ; you shall see for yourself Here, attendant, go and bid Vidhyujjhva come here with the Aryan's head and bow "

One of the Rakshasi guards went out to obey, and soon Vidhyujjhva came in carrying a severed head in one hand and a mighty bow in the other, and he placed them both in front of Sita. The same matted hair, the same high forehead with thick high-arched brows, all the well-known and dearly loved features were surely there ; only, the dear eyes were closed, and the slightly parted lips now seemed to smile at her in death And the bow ; surely it was the same dreaded weapon which no one could string or wield but her lord, and which she had taken from him night after night in their wanderings to keep safe Sita gazed on these for a moment, and then her heart seemed to sink within her suddenly, and she fainted When she came to herself after a while, she again looked intently, and all doubt vanished Yes, he was dead and she was now a widow The vengeance of the cruel and wicked queen Kaikeyi was now complete The learned and saintly elders who had blessed her dear lord and foretold for him a long life of kingship and renown had all spoken false.

Her own chastity and wifely devotion, and his righteousness and rare self-sacrifice had alike proved vain, and Evil had after all prevailed over Good, and Might over Right

"On the day you first took my hand in yours," bewailed the princess, weeping bitterly, and gazing on the beloved face of her husband which now lay lifeless on the ground before her, "you promised me, my lord, to perform the duties of life always with me Why have you thus forsaken me now and left me a lonely and helpless widow? I cannot bear this, and I pray you, be true to your word, and call me too to your side. Jackals and vultures will now devour your beautiful body which I have been longing to embrace, and of the three exiles who left Ayodhya, only Lakshmana, will return home Queen Kausalya will surely die, the moment she hears the dire news I have proved a fatal curse to you, and not a dear wife bringing in with her all good luck and happiness Kill me too, this moment, O thou cruel and wicked Ravana, slay me with the same sword, I beseech thee, and lay my body by the side of my dear lord Let us be united at least in death, and great and good will be thy reward, for this kindly act Cut off my head too, and lay it by his head, and my body by his body I do not wish to live a moment longer, and I wish to follow my dear husband."

So wailed and wept the forlorn princess in helpless anguish. Just then, Ravana was called away by a messenger, who came and informed him that his generals and ministers had come and were waiting outside the grove, wishing to see him urgently.

When the Rakshasa monarch was gone, Vidhyujjiva took away the head and bow; and Sarama, her Rakshasi friend, then told Sita of their true nature, of the safety of Rama and his army, and of the preparations of the Rakshasas for the war which was yet to be

Ravana's mother and grand-father, as well as many another old and trusted friend and minister, advised him earnestly to give up Sita and to seek peace. They pointed to the many evil omens that were happening in Lanka, and declared that God would never allow Evil to triumph over Righteousness. They advised, they pleaded, they entreated, and they warned him. But it was all in vain. Neither his fatal love for Sita, nor his great pride, would allow him to submit. He was not one to do a deed and then repent of it. He would do his best to exalt it, and he would at all events abide its consequences. Nor was there the least fear or doubt in his mind. He gave orders for the defence of the city, himself guarding the north gate with a mighty army. Come what might, he would never yield, and he was no craven or

half crazed with rage and shame, and tearing his heart out in lamentations that would burst forth in spite of him. The thought that Sita would now mock and spurn him more than ever cut him to the quick; he was beside himself with shame and sorrow. Then came to him his old grand-father, Malyavan, who comforted him, and advised him to give up Sita ere it was too late. Then did Ravana, like a true hero, generously praise the skill and valour of the Aryan princes and rejoice that if he was doomed to die by their hands, he could still be glad that these were foes full worthy of his steel. But he was not willing to yield, and one of his wicked ministers advised him not to be disheartened, but to send out his giant brother Kumbhakarna against the enemy. Ravana readily fell in with this counsel, and bade his brother, who was then in one of his long fits of sleep, to be roused and brought to him.

When Kumbhakarna came, and learnt why he had been sent for by his royal brother, he asked in a remorseful and bitter tone whether the deed of sin and shame had not yet been set right and Sita sent back, and whether the unrighteous war, which was sure to end in their defeat if not destruction, had come at last. He again advised his brother to send back Sita, for righteousness alone could bring victory.

Ravana grew very angry on hearing these

words, and said: "I sent for thee to fight for me, and not because I wanted advice! Thy boasted prowess and courage are alike false; bloated with flesh and wine thou hast become unfit for thy sole duty of fighting for thy King. Go home to thy sleep again, coward and glutton, and know that the King of Lanka will never, bend his knee to the Aryans and their Vanara friends, like thee and thy treacherous brother Vibhishana. Ho! servants, bring me my arms and order my war-chariot to be yoked at once, and I shall myself go forth again, and drive away these petty besiegers"

But Kumbhakarna was in sooth neither a coward nor a traitor, and he again saluted his angry brother's feet, and meekly replied. "Not through fear did I speak thus, O my King and brother, nor am I in the least unwilling to obey your bidding. I have done my duty to myself, to my conscience, by thus pointing out what I think is right and proper. I am now ready to go forth and fight your foemen; but I dare not say that I shall slay them and return to you, for victory in war is in the hands of God. Be sure, however, I shall fight for you to the last drop in my veins, and if perchance I am overcome, and I fall, I implore you then at least to take warning from my fate and give up Sita. For he who conquers me will surely overcome you too, and this you know full well. If ever I have

unwittingly said or done aught in my life to offend you, let me, I pray you, my dear brother and King, have now your forgiveness therefor. For I go forth to meet my doom, and I may not see your face again."

Ravana was greatly touched by these words, and he lovingly embraced his brother and praised his affection and loyalty. He then buckled his armour on him with his own hands, and sent him to the field with a mighty host of Rakshasas. The very sight of the huge giant and his vast army was enough to make the hearts of the Vanaras quail, and they fled in fear on all sides. Angadha taunted them with cowardice and rallied them, and general after general went forth against Kumbhakarna, but had to soon return vanquished.

By Rama's advice, Vibhishna, who knew full well that his brother's private opinion was against and for the return of Sita, then sought to win over the hero to their side. On seeing his brother come towards him in peace, Kumbhakarna asked him why he came back from his new friends, and said that he would be sorry if he had changed his mind again. Vibhishana then told his purpose, and begged him to go over to Rama's side.

"You have done your duty by our King and brother by pointing out the right and proper course," pleaded Vibhishana, "and it is not

meet that you should share his fall, if he chooses to persist in his unrighteousness. Come over to us, and fight not against Right and Justice. Rama is noble and gracious, and he has sent me to speak to you. He has crowned me King of Lanka, but I shall give over the crown to you who are my elder brother, and you shall become king after Ravana's death. I ask you only to obey your own conscience and act righteously."

There was no doubt or wavering in Kumbhakarna's mind, and he replied in a sad but firm tone. "Return thou to thy righteous friends, my brother, and let me be sure that there will be at least one of us left to perform the funeral rites after we fall. This life is but a bubble, and it is not so sweet to me nor Lanka's throne so tempting, that I should swerve from my duty and forsake my brother and King in trouble. I am a soldier, and I have eaten the King's bread all my life, and he has put on me this armour and given me these weapons with his own hands, and sent me to fight his foes. My duty is therefore to fight for him till I fall, and a true soldier can never run away from the field of battle, nor prove false to the salt he has eaten. Great and famous is Lanka's King, and it would be a shame if he should lie dead on the bloody field without even one brother to keep him company. Return thou to thy friends,

I pray thee, and leave me to my doom."

The fight was then resumed, and at last Kumbhakarna was slain by Rama after a long and terrible fight. Then the Vanaras shouted in joy and the Rakshasa hosts fled back in fear and confusion.

Great was Ravana's grief on hearing of his mighty brother's fall, and he bewailed his loss grievously, and shed bitter tears for him. But there was no thought of submission or of seeking peace, and army after army was sent out, and the famous Rakshasa chiefs and generals including Ravana's son Adhikaya fell in numbers on the bloody field.



XLV. The Fall of Indrajit.

BORNE down with sorrow and shame at repeated defeats and by the loss of so many of his near kinsmen and valiant generals, Ravana was disheartened somewhat, and knew not what to do. Then his eldest son, Indrajit, next only to himself and Kumbhakarna in strength and valour, and without a peer in magic art and feats of illusion, came to his father's help, and opposed the enemy with a mighty host. After a most valorous and terrible fight, he overcame the enemy. Many of the heroes, including Rama and Lakshmana,

were wounded by poisoned arrows and other powerful weapons, and fell down in the field unconscious. Indrajit thereupon returned to Lanka in triumph to gladden his father's heart with the happy news. But those who fell had only fainted, and some of them had been only feigning so to escape the mighty Rakshasa's attack. Now as before, Vibhishana came to the rescue. The Rakshasas were a strange and unknown people to the Aryans, and even the Vanaras knew little of their ways and methods of warfare: Vibhishana, however, betrayed to them all their secrets, told them of their chiefs and generals, and advised how best they might be met or foiled. His four comrades in desertion went into Lanka in disguise, learnt fully of Ravana's plans and defences, and reported them to Rama. And now, when they were in such a sore plight, Vibhishana told them of a potent herb, a matchless antidote to the poison which had thrown so many leaders into a swoon, and the brave and faithful Hanuman succeeded in getting it. And lo! on its being applied to the wounds, the unconscious heroes got up as from a sleep and were soon whole again. Ravana and his son were rejoicing in the belief that the enemy had been overcome completely, when, suddenly, a daring host of the Vanaras, with fire-brands and torches in their hands, made a sortie into the city and set fire to many houses and other

buildings. The Rakshasas soon learnt what had really happened, and there was a tough fight in which some more of the famous Rakshasa warriors were slain, including Makaraksha, the son of Kara and nephew of Ravana.

Once more Ravana sent his valiant son Indrajit against the enemy, and there was a grim combat between him and Lakshmana in which neither was defeated. Indrajit then returned to Lanka pursued by the Vanaras. But by his matchless skill and power, we are told, he soon produced an illusionary Sita before Hanuman and the other Vanaras, and while she was seemingly struggling and weeping, he drew his sword and slew her in their presence. Frightened and dismayed, the Vanara hosts returned to their camp, thinking that their labours had proved in vain, and that all was over, now that Sita was dead.

Rama fainted on hearing the news, and Lakshmana was sorely cast down. Once more did Vibhishana prove their succour. He assured them that Ravana would never allow Sita to be slain, and that it was all an illusion of Indrajit, who was the mightiest magician among the Rakshasas. Indrajit had done this only to gain time, so that he might perform a sacrificial penance which would add to his powers and make him invincible. Vibhishana therefore advised the Vanaras to go forth at once and mar

the sacrifice and slay the magician. He pointed out to Lakshmana the place where Indrajit had betaken himself for the sacrifice and urged him to attack him there.

"Traitor to your King and country and bondsman to our foe!" exclaimed Indrajit on seeing Vibhishana, "Seek you now to slay your own brother's son? Have you no shame at all, no sense of honour, no feeling of kinship? Forget not that a traitor is honoured only as long as he is deemed useful and necessary and that he is afterwards slain as untrustworthy even by those who had given him refuge. False and treacherous, who else but you can do such a shameful and hateful deed and betray your nearest kinsmen in this manner?"

"Reville not so, wicked boy, nor forget to whom thou art speaking," replied Vibhishana. "Though born a Rakshasa, I was never of your ways and opinions. Who seeks true happiness and good must shake off all sin and wickedness, even as one shakes off a cobra which may happen to fall on one's hand. I have given up my sinful brother and kinsmen, as one deserts a burning house doomed to destruction. Unlawful lust, anger, pride, avarice, hatred, suspicion of one's true friends, are all hateful to my nature, and so have I left my brother and Lanka. Your sacrifice has been spoiled and you will surely die to-day. Your father is also doomed.

Boast and prate not therefore in your blind wickedness and short-lived pride."

Indrajit left his unfinished sacrifice to fight Lakshmana, and most terrible and marvellous was the battle that ensued. Vibhishana constantly advised and cheered on Lakshmana; he even took part in the fight and attacked Indrajit's followers and killed the horses of his chariot. Then his angry nephew aimed a dreadful bolt at him, which, but for Lakshmana's timely protection, would have killed him there and then. Indrajit was at last slain by Lakshmana, and there was great joy among the Vanara hosts over his fall. The Rakshasas fled in fear and dismay, on the fall of their great prince and hero. Lakshmana returned to the camp triumphant, and Rama embraced him lovingly and praised his valour and prowess in having slain such a renowned and mighty Rakshasa. "No common deed of heroism hast thou done this day, my valiant brother," said Rama joyfully, "for thou hast cut off the right hand of Lanka's monarch, and he is as good as defeated now. Having such a brother, victory shall surely be mine. Nor may I forget the invaluable help which Vibhishana and Hanuman have rendered you in this day's battle. Great is the joy in my heart, and my gratitude to you all is boundless."

Then Rama bade Sushena attend to the wounds of Lakshmana, Vibhishana, Hanuman and the rest, and there was much feasting and rejoicing in the Vanara camp



XLVI. Ravana's Grief and Rage.

WHEN Ravana heard that his eldest son and heir, Indrajit, was slain in the day's battle by Lakshmana, he fell down in a swoon. Flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones, Indrajit was Ravana's first-born son, the child of Mandhodhari, Maya's beautiful daughter whom Hanuman had at first mistaken for Sita. And Indrajit was, in might and valour, next only to himself and his giant-brother Kumbhakarna, while in magic arts and illusions he had no peer among the Rakshasas. He had, even as a youth, covered himself with immortal glory by overcoming Indra, the King of the Devas, and Ravana was fondly hoping that under such a successor to himself, the Rakshasa race would become even more famous and powerful in the world. Indrajit was the centre of all his life's hopes and ambitions and the best beloved of his sons. Borne down with sorrow and shame at the loss of his peerless brother, his other sons and kinsmen, and his bravest and most renowned generals, and unwilling to face the haughty and ever-successful foe himself, Ravana had

relied on his eldest son to redeem his fortunes and honour. And this sudden and unexpected blow crushed him cruelly and overwhelmed him with helpless grief. When he came to himself again after a long while, he wept pitifully like a child, and lamented aloud. "Leaving thy great kingdom, thy loyal subjects, thy loving father and mother, and thy dear wife, where hast thou gone, my child, and how shall I bear thy loss or console thy mother? How shall I ever overcome the mighty foe hereafter? And what shall I do with my kingdom, or even with my life, now thou art gone? Alas! I fondly hoped that thou wouldst watch by my bedside, close my eyes, and perform my funeral rites when my allotted days were over, but now, the course of nature has changed, and I weep thy all too untimely death."

The proud monarch of Lanka wailed aloud his sad fate and tore his hair in the agony of his grief like a woman, and then, declaring in a fit of rage and revenge, that she who was the sole cause of all his misfortunes and utter ruin should pay for it with her life, he drew his sword and rushed towards the *asoka* grove to slay Sita. "Turn your wrath against your foe Rama, and his brother Lakshmana who slew your son, and sully not your great name and fame by drawing your sword on a helpless woman," exclaimed his faithful minister Supar-

su "It ill befits your great learning and wisdom to thus give way to blind anger, and forget what is right and proper and what is not. If die we must, let us at least die a brave and honourable death, and let it not be said that the mighty and world-famous monarch of the Rakshasa race stained his sword with the blood of a helpless, captive woman. Stay your wrath, Sire, and be not tempted into a deed which you cannot recall and which must soil your name for ever "

"Well hast thou said, my trusty minister," replied Ravana sheathing his sword. "Grief and rage are always blind. But the exulting foe shall pay for this dearly on the morrow. Summon thou my trusted friends and warriors to meet me in the palace even now, and let us consider how best we may overcome those who have caused among us such sad havoc and ruin."

Hitherto the war had mainly been a series of single combats between individual heroes on either side. In fact, war in ancient times is generally described as such, and renowned warriors on either side sought and singled out each other and fought to the death. But there was no Rakshasa hero left now, and Ravana himself was too much stricken with grief to take the field at once. So the mighty Reserve Hosts of Rakshasas, known as *Moolabalam*, were sent out against the enemy, and they were told

to single out Rama and Lakshmana and slay them if possible. But the Vanaras and the Rukshas surrounded the Aryan princes, and in the great battle that took place, thousands of Rakshasas were slain, and but a few of the vast forces came fleeing back to Lanka with their lives. Then there was dire wailing and weeping in the Rakshasa homes all over the city. Forlorn widows, mothers, sisters, and orphans, in the bitterness of their bereavements, all cried aloud, and openly blamed their King for having brought about the death of their dear ones, and all for the sinful love of a strange woman. Their cries and lamentations reached the ears of Ravana, sorrowing in his palace for the death of his own beloved brother and sons, and he writhed in shame and helpless fury. Deciding to fight the enemy again in person, he ordered the remnants of his forces to be gathered together to accompany him. The thoughts of the proud and boastful monarch were now as bitter as wormwood, and his heart was heavy with grief, and he had no zest or joy left in life. But his duty as a king and warrior was clear; so he girded up his loins, and went forth to meet his doom, accompanied by such of his generals as were yet alive.



XLVII. The Fall of Ravana.

BURNING with rage and reckless in despair, the great Rakshasa hero entered the field and fought with all his might and main. The Vanara hosts fled before him like sheep at the coming of the tiger into the fold. Sugriva, Jambuvan and other warriors engaged Ravana's generals in combat, but none of them dared to face the irate monarch himself. Then the brave Lakshmana went forward and engaged him, and while they were fighting, Vibhishana attacked the horses of his brother's chariot and killed them. Enraged beyond measure, Ravana jumped to the ground, and threw a mighty javelin at his treacherous brother, who had surely died then had not the missile been warded off by Lakshmana. Ravana then aimed a mightier javelin at Lakshmana himself, and the brave Aryan prince fell down in a swoon, pierced in the chest. Rama was sorely aggrieved at this and feared for his brother's life. But there was no time to bewail, or even to attend to the wounded hero. Rama drew off the shaft from his brother's chest, and then bidding Sugriva and Hanuman to look after him, he rushed forth to meet the rejoicing Ravana. After a short but stern conflict Ravana fled the field, and Rama returned to his brother who was apparently dead.

Rama was broken down with grief and wept: "Of what avail is my wretched life, my wife Sita, and my kingdom to me hereafter," exclaimed he passionately, "now that my dear brother is no more! My brother is dead, and there is no more use in fighting. Wife and kindred may be got anew in any land, but where is the country where I may get such another brother? Woe is me! I am the most unhappy of men."

Sushena the skilled physician and surgeon, the good Tara's father, now comforted him with the assurance that Lakshmana was not dead, that there was yet life in the body. He sent the redoubtable Hanuman again to fetch some marvellously powerful herbs, and Sushena applied them to the wounds and made Lakshmana breathe in their essence; and lo! the prince soon revived and sat up again, to the great joy of Rama and his friends.

"I see thee alive again through my great good fortune," exclaimed Rama, embracing his brother tenderly; "but if you had really died, of what avail would my life have been to me any longer? Sita and victory would alike have been of no good to me, if you my dear brother had died."

"True and mighty hero and my brother!" replied Lakshmana, "speak not so, forgetting the promise you have made to Vibhishana."

Even if I die, it is not meet that you should give up everything else for my sake. Arise, I pray you, go forth and slay the great King of Lanka, and crown Vibhishana in his stead, redeeming so your solemn pledge. Truth and honour alike demand it."

By this time, Indra, the King of the Devas and Ravana's life-long enemy, hearing of Rama's invasion of Lanka, sent his matchless chariot and charioteer for his use in the war. The combat between Rama and Ravana was even more grim and tough the next day, and now one of them seemed to give in, and now the other. When Ravana was exhausted and unable to cope with Rama, his charioteer turned his chariot and drove it away from the field in order that he might rest awhile. But Ravana was much enraged at this, and took his charioteer to task for such an ignoble act, and bade him drive again towards Rama. The charioteer replied that he was neither a coward nor one unskilled in his duties, nor unaware of his master's world-wide fame and matchless valour. The horses were very tired, and according to the rules of war, a charioteer had discretion when to go near and when to keep further from the foe. He had acted so only out of pity for the horses, and for the great love he bore towards his master, whose bidding he was ever ready to obey.

Ravana praised him for his good intentions and bade him drive straight towards Rama, as he had sworn not to quit the field that day without killing him.

Just then, the great sage Agasthya, the pioneer of Aryan civilisation in South India and therefore the enemy of the whole Rakshasa race, came from the mainland. News of Rama's invasion of Lanka and the war seems to have already spread far and wide in India, and all who had a grudge against the Rakshasas came to help their foes. Agasthya could not have come in better time. He imparted to Rama a potent secret which would enable him to overcome his foe.

When Rama therefore again saw Ravana's chariot approach, he was eager and ready to meet him. Again they fought grimly and long, but were no nearer the end. Then India's charioteer advised Rama to use the unerring and unfailing bolt Brahmastrum against the foe, and he did so, and Ravana fell down dead. A tremendous shout of joy and triumph then rose from the Vanara ranks, and Rama's friends showered congratulations and praises on him, while the Rakshasa forces fled back in fear and confusion.

Vibhishana is said to have shed some natural tears on the fall of his royal brother, but, no doubt he dried them soon. We hear later that

he first refused to perform the funeral rites of his elder brother because he was a sinful and wicked man, and that the Aryan stranger, Rama, that brother's mortal foe, had to persuade him to discharge that duty to the departed, praising Ravana as a great and renowned hero and pointing out that death put an end to all strife and hatred. Wherever Rama is revered and worshipped as an *avatar* of Vishnu, Vibhishana, or Vibhishana Azhvar as he is more honourably known, is also revered as a great *Bhakta* and a very saintly and righteous personage. This is of course from the Aryan point of view, and he is said to have become one of the immortals for his devotion to Rama. But we have to remember that, placed in a similar plight, the great Bhishma behaved quite otherwise in the *Mahabharata*, and his conduct too has been highly applauded. Not only did Vibhishana desert his brother and king, join his mortal foe, allow himself to be crowned King while his brother was yet living, and bring about his downfall and death by incessantly aiding his enemies as no one else could have helped them, but he actually took up arms and attacked his nephew and his brother against the rules of war, when they were engaged in single combat with another man, and when his brother died, he first refused to perform his funeral rites, though he was

not unwilling to inherit his crown and kingdom I have no doubt that a Rakshasa version of the Aryan invasion and conquest of Lanka would have depicted Vibhishana in even more glaring, but certainly far less favourable colours.



XLVIII. Mandhodhari's Lament.

WHEN the news of Ravana's death reached Lanka, Queen Māndhodhari and the other wives of Ravana came to the battlefield, weeping and wailing. On seeing her husband's mangled corpse lying on the ground in a pool of blood and pierced by many arrows, Mandhodhari fell upon the body, and began to lament in a truly heart-rending tone. "Most mighty of monarchs! Brother of Kubera! Dreaded by your foes and even by the king of the Devas! Lie you here so low on this gruesome field, dead and dishonoured, even like the meanest of your subjects? O! I can hardly believe what I see now! Curbing the five senses in your early life, you did rare penance, but now they have revenged themselves on you by over-mastering your mind and bringing you to this sad state. Often and often did I entreat you to send back Sita. But your love was of Fate, for your utter ruin and for the ruin of all who belonged to you, and so you did not heed me. Such an

act of shame and sin was quite unworthy of you, and an insult and disgrace to me. The yearning of your heart was not fulfilled, and the chaste Sita's tears have ruined us all. The wages of sin is death, and he who does Evil must eat its bitter fruit, even as he who does good attains happiness. You had many wives in your harem far more beautiful than Sita; but blinded by love you could not know it. Not in high birth, not in beauty, not in feminine charms and accomplishments, was Sita superior to me, or even my peer; but love blinded you to the truth. They say that nothing that is born ever dies except through an apparent cause; and Sita has proved the cause of your death. You sought out and brought your death from a very long distance. All her troubles ended, Sita will now be happy with her husband, while unfortunate wretch that I am, I shall be drowned in helpless grief. The memory of the happy days I spent with you on Mount Kailasa, and in the groves of Mandara and Meru only add to my present misery. I have become another woman now, and I can never more know such happiness. O fickle and fleeting are the fortunes and pleasures of royalty! The handsome face and features on which I gazed so fondly, as I lay on your breast and as you told me pleasant tales, how gruesome and bloody do they look now, pierced by Rama's arrows and

begrimed with mud! You are dead, and I have become a widow! Alas! I never even dreamt that such a fate would ever overtake me! My father Maya is the King of the Danavas; my husband, the mighty Ravana, is the monarch of the great Rakshasa race; and my peerless son is the conqueror of Indra. Thinking thus, I was very proud, and never feared any mishap from anybody. Most mighty of warriors! How did the Aryan prince, who came wandering into the jungle as a hermit, ever overcome you? I see his many arrows sticking out of your body like the quills of the porcupine, fearful to behold. But am I awake? Has Rama really killed the great monarch of Lanka? Or is it all a dream? The wives of your foemen used to tremble at your name, and feel their necks to see whether their *Mangalya sutras* were safe. And now, I, your wife and queen, weep and bewail here helplessly, and you will not speak a word to console me. Are you vexed with me, my husband, because, with uncovered head, I have come out walking, to this bloody field? Was I not your first and best love, and have you not vowed again and again that you loved me most, until you saw that fatal woman? Speak but a word, I beseech you, even for the sake of our old love. Abandoning your soft silken bed of luxury and ease, how do you lie now on the bare, hard ground?

But I knew that such would be the end, even when my son Indrajit, most mighty of warriors, was slain by the foe. Many of my kinsmen have died ere now, but I grieved not much. But to-day, with your death dies also all my happiness in life. I cannot bear this, and I do not even for a moment wish to outlive you. I beseech you, take me too the way you have gone, for it is most unkind of you to leave me thus alone. They say that 'the tears which a chaste woman sheds in sorrow, never fall in vain' and so it has proved now. Victor of the three worlds, I know not how this base and ignoble thought of stealing another man's wife ever entered your mind. I had never heard that you were afraid of any one. So when I first learnt that you had stolen Sita during her husband's absence, I felt that it was no common thing, that it foreboded no good. By your lust and wilful pride, you have brought ruin on so many. For your one evil deed, the whole Rakshasa race has been destroyed. But it is not meet that I should speak to you thus. Being a weak woman, I prattle so in my great grief. You have gone to Heaven with the fruits of all your good and evil deeds, and I bemoan my loneliness here on earth. You heeded not the advice of your true friends and your brothers, and this is the dire result. But I pray you, look at me, your dear and ever-loving queen, and speak but one word of

comfort. Have you no love for me at all now? O my heart is of stone that it has not burst yet, even after seeing my dear lord lying dead in this manner! O what shall I do! I am undone for ever!"

Thus sobbed and wailed the good queen, shedding tears of blood in her great agony, and at last she fainted away on the field of battle with Ravana's body in her arms. The other wives of Ravana, who were also grieving sorely and lamenting aloud, revived her with difficulty and sought to comfort her by dilating on the fickleness of fortune and the vanity of all earthly hopes and ambitions. By this time, Vibhishana too came there to perform his brother's last rites, persuaded thereto by Rama; and he spoke some words of comfort to the mourning women and persuaded them to go back to the palace



XLIX. The Ordeal by Fire.

WHEN Vibhishana returned to the camp after performing his brother's funeral rites, Rama's first care was to fulfil his promise by having him crowned King of Lanka. The ceremony was conducted by Lakshmana with great pomp, and then Rama told Hanuman to go into Lanka with Vibhishana's permission, and inform Sita of his success and bring news of her. Hanu-

man went to the *asoka* grove with a proud and joyous heart, and surely no one would grudge him the honour. When she heard the happy news, Sita wept tears of joy, and she could hardly find words at first to express her gratitude to the brave Vanara hero. He it was who had first found her and saved her from a sinful death, risking his own life many times in the venture; and he it was who now bore the most gladsome news which put an end to her unbearable misery. What was there in the three worlds precious enough to be given as a fitting reward for such priceless service! Hanuman replied that his task of love was more than rewarded by her kind words, and she praised him again from the bottom of her heart. Hanuman then proposed to slay the Rakshasi guards who had treated her so cruelly. Sita would not hear of it, and her noble words showed how good she was. "They are but servants of Ravana," said she, "who obeyed their king's bidding in acting as they did. Your anger should not be directed against such. What I suffered was of fate, due to my ill-luck and the sins of my past births. The wise man does good in return for evil. To err is human, but to forgive is true nobleness." Hanuman then praised her as a wife worthy of the great and noble Rama, and begged for leave to return to him. She sent word that she was eager to see her lord again, and Hanuman

returned to the camp and informed Rama accordingly.

Rama's eyes filled with tears, and he was lost in thought for a while, then he heaved a sigh and asked Vibhishana, who was standing near, to fetch Sita to him without delay, after she was first bathed and robed in a fitting manner.

Vibhishana, thereupon, hastened to his palace, and taking some ladies of his family with him, informed Sita through them of Rama's wishes. Sita objected at first, saying that she would meet her husband even as she then was. Vibhishana urged that it was best to do as her lord desired, and then Sita agreed. Thereupon some Rakshasi maids attended to her toilet; and decked in precious gems and silks, Sita was brought to her lord in a richly covered palanquin. Vibhishana went in advance, and gladly told Rama of her approach. On hearing that Sita, who had dwelt long in the Rakshasa's house, was come, a mingled feeling of joy, humiliation and anger arose in Rama's heart. He was lost in thought for a while, and turning to Vibhishana, who was standing by in doubt and perplexity, Rama said "Good King of the Rakshasas! O you, who ever seek my victory! let Sita be brought before me at once." Vibhishana then ordered the crowd of Vanaras, Rukshas and Rakshasas, who were pressing round on all sides, to be beaten back, so as to make way

for Sita, but Rama exclaimed in wrath: "Why do you thus molest these people without my permission? They are all my people. Further, not houses, not clothes, not surrounding screens and such marks of regal honour, really guard the chastity of women; their righteous conduct alone can guard their honour. It is no fault if women appear in public when they are in trouble or danger, on the field of battle, where they choose their lords or wed them, before the sacrificial altar. Thus Sita has now come to the field of battle. She is in great trouble now, and there is no harm if all see her. Besides, I am near by. So, Vibhishana, bring her here at once, and let Sita see me surrounded by my friends."

Hesitatingly, Vibhishana brought Sita before Rama, whose angry speech filled the minds of his brother and his friends with fear and doubt; for they surmised he loved her not now and meant to discard her. Shrinking with modesty, Sita followed Vibhishana close behind, and approached her husband. On reaching Rama in that vast assembly, Sita muttered the word, "Lord," but she could say no more. She hid her face with her cloth and began to weep, then through her tears, she gazed fondly on the beloved face of her husband, and forgot in that gladsome moment all the misery she had suffered for a whole year.

Looking well on Sita who meekly stood by his side, Rama spake as follows, out of the wrath swelling in his bosom: "I have overcome my foe, happy lady, and redeemed you and my honour. The fate that doomed you to be abducted by the wicked Ravana has been set right by my valour." And then he went on to praise the heroism of his friends, Hanuman, Sugriva, and Vibhishana. On hearing these words which bore no hint or token of his love for her, or his intention to take her back as his wife, Sita wept bitterly; and seeing her tears, Rama waxed more and more in wrath. Then knitting his brows and frowning in anger, he said: "Sita! I have spared nothing to revenge the disgrace which my foe laid upon me. But think not that I did all this for your sake, it was only to redeem my honour and to remove the stain on the fair name of my family. You have dwelt long in the house of my foe and you are decked gaily in silks and jewels. Your very sight pains me now, even like a bright lamp seen by one whose eyes are sore. Therefore, O Sita! the world lies all before you, and I give you leave to go where you please. Happy lady! There is naught I need at your hands hereafter. Which high-born hero will ever take back to his bosom the wife who dwelt in the house of another? Carried away by Ravana and coveted by his lustful eyes, you have lost your purity,

and I cannot take you back. I rescued you for the sake of my honour, not because of my love for you. Go where you will, abandoned by me, you may dwell in comfort hereafter in the house of Lakshmana, or Bharata, or Sugriva, or Vibhishana, and they will no doubt protect you. Beautiful and charming as you are, Ravana would not have left you pure while you lived in his house."

On hearing these cruel words of her dear lord, Sita trembled, and wept more and more. Never before had she listened to such words, and she bent her head in shame before that great assembly. Tears streamed from her eyes ceaselessly. Drying her tears, she meekly addressed her lord in these words, though choking with grief and shame.

"Hero! why speak you such fearful, cruel and unbecoming words to me, even as a little man addresses a little woman? I am not as you think. I swear this on all I hold dear and sacred, believe me. Judging by the conduct of common women, you doubt the whole sex. You know me well, and so I beseech you, distrust me not. Lord! If another man touched me, I could not help it. Fate alone should be blamed for it. My heart was always set upon you; weak woman that I am, how could I help what might happen to my body? Knowing me well for so many years, if you still doubt me,

I am indeed undone. Mightiest of warriors! Why did you send Hanuman in search of me, if you doubted me? Had I known this then, I should surely have put an end to my useless life long ago. You need not have risked your life thus, or put your friends to so much trouble. Lion among men! carried away by your anger, you have judged of me as only an ordinary woman, and have never thought of my righteousness, or of my noble birth! You wedded me in early youth, and you must have known well my devotion to you and to virtue. Have you forgotten it all then?" Then turning with tearful eyes to Lakshmana, who was standing by in painful thought, she said: "Lakshmana! Pile up some logs and light a pyre for me. That is the only remedy for my present woe. Falsely slandered thus, I can bear life no longer. A true and loyal wife, I have been abandoned in this assembly by my doubting husband, and I therefore wish to seek my salvation by entering fire."

The brave Lakshmana, addressed thus by Sita, turned towards Rama piteously, but Rama's eyes only confirmed her request. Then Lakshmana lit a fire in the midst of that astonished assembly, and Sita, slowly and in reverence, stepped round her husband, who was sitting with bent head and averted face, and neared the fire. With joined palms, she saluted

the Gods and the great ones of the earth and said "If my heart has never swerved from my husband Rama, may this Holy Fire bear witness to it and harm not me! As Raghava suspects me, his righteous wife, let the God of Fire guard me! If I have never, by thought, word or deed, been unfaithful to Rama, let this Fire save me! If sun and moon, wind and water, day and night, all this earth and creation, have ever known me as a true woman, may this Fire protect me!" Then she stepped round the fire in reverence, and without the least fear or doubt in her mind, she jumped into it, to the great astonishment and horror of that vast gathering

Then it was that Rama began to repent of his cruelty, and to doubt whether he had done right. Then, we are told, that Agni, the God of Fire, brought Sita all unhurt, with not a flower in her hair withered nor a fold of her dress deranged, and presented her to Rama, assuring him of her spotless purity. Then Rama accepted Sita gladly, and declared that he never doubted her innocence, or her unswerving love for him, and that he allowed her to undergo the ordeal by fire only to convince the world, which would otherwise have blamed him for a blindly doting, dishonourable man. He was a king and a hero who held Truth as the highest religion; so his wife must be above suspicion, and it was

his duty to set an example to the world. This was Rama's excuse for his apparently heartless, almost inhuman treatment of his loving wife. The appearance of Sita, dressed richly and gaily, seems to have enraged her husband most and inflamed his jealousy, though it was he who bade her be brought to him so. With natural and pardonable pride, he seems to have desired that his new friends should first see her, the dear wife of his bosom for whose sake he had freely endangered his and their lives, in all the splendour of her matchless beauty. But when, against her true womanly instinct and solely to obey him, she agreed to it and did so appear, his jealousy was inflamed,—all true deep love is intensely jealous—his mind was thrown out of balance, and he began to doubt whether the wicked Ravana would have spared such a glorious flower when it was so long in his possession and power. To my mind, no other incident in the *Ramayana* brings out before us more forcibly the human heart in Rama, and we are inclined to exclaim that he was truly flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone in this seemingly cruel and unreasonable outburst of his jealousy. The first of our poets, Valmiki was truly a profound reader of the human heart, and the deep, lasting and almost tyrannic hold of his poem on the Indian mind is no matter for wonder.

As for the ordeal itself, 'fire-walking' is said to

be done even now, but, all the same, I think it would be an insult to all womanhood to apply such a test of innocence. Though Sita is made to call on Fire to prove her purity by not hurting her, she first asked for it only to put an end to her life. We may take it that her husband and his friends were greatly impressed by her courage, faith, and readiness to enter the fire rather than outlive such a suspicion, and so they either prevented her, or else rescued her in time from the flames.



L. The Return of the Exiles

THE grateful Vibhishana then wished to entertain Rama at a royal feast, and begged that he would stay in Lanka for a while. But Rama would not hear of it, as the time of exile was well-nigh over, and he was eager to return to the dear ones pining for him at Ayodhya. Vibhishana thereupon placed Ravana's aerial car, Pushpaka at Rama's disposal for the journey, and he and the Vanara heroes begged leave to accompany him to Ayodhya to witness his coronation. So they all left Lanka at once, and the happy and bashful Sita was seated by Rama's side in the car. Rama pointed out to her on the way the places of interest he had passed through in search of her, telling her also of the incidents which then happened. When they

reached Kishkindha, Sita wished to see the wives of the Vanara heroes and to take them with her to Ayodhya, as she was then a lonely woman in the midst of so many warriors. This was done, and the party soon reached Bharadwaja's hermitage. Rama again calling to mind the many memorable spots and events during their southward journey

Old Bharadwaja was still alive and hale, and right gladly did he welcome and feast the royal exiles and their friends. Rama asked the sage for news of Ayodhya and the welfare of his mother, brothers, and the rest of his kin there, and whether Bharata was ruling the land well. Bharadwaja's reply was most assuring and favourable, and Rama learnt from him that Bharata was leading the life of a hermit, and ruling the country righteously from a village outside the capital, eagerly awaiting his return. Then Rama sent Hanuman in advance to Bharata, nor did he forget in his message the faithful hunter-chieftain Guha, whom Hanuman would meet on his way. Rama instructed Hanuman to watch and note Bharata's feelings when he broke the news to him, for he did not wish to oust him from the throne. If seduced by the long enjoyment of royalty and power, his brother was unwilling to part with them now, and was sorry for the return of the rightful owner. Great was Bharata's gladness however,

on hearing the news of his long-lost brother's coming on the morrow, and he wept and laughed like a child in sheer joy, embracing Hanuman fondly. He gave orders for the immediate decoration of the city, and for a grand royal procession, headed by himself and Satrugna, to go forth and meet their rightful King. The joy of the people knew no bounds, and soon the whole city was in an uproar of excitement and with preparations to welcome the returning exiles in a befitting manner. How can words adequately describe the ecstasy of happiness in the long-suffering motherly heart of Kausalya and of Sumitra in that moment of supreme bliss? We may take it that no purer or more fervent prayers ever rose to the throne of the Almighty from this sad earth than those then offered by the two queens, and let us also hope that even Kaikeyi was after all glad of it, and sincerely so.

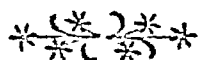
The meeting of the brothers on the next day was a very pathetic scene, and Rama fondly embraced Bharata many times and seated him by his side on Pushpaka. He introduced his new friends to him, praising them warmly, and everybody marvelled at Bharata's rare brotherly devotion and righteousness. There was an even more touching scene later when the exiles were met by the queen-mothers. On reaching Bharata's hermitage at Nandigramam, a grand

procession was formed to Ayodhya, and Rama re-entered his capital in great pomp, and amidst the joyous acclamations of his people. Then Bharata restored to Rama the sandals which he had taken from him at Chitrakuta and treated with regal honours ever since, and begged him to resume the crown and Kingdom which he had held in trust for him for so many years. By his brother's grace, he had increased ten-fold the royal treasures, the stock in the granaries, and the strength of the army; but the cares of the State were too much for him, and he was oppressed by them, like a tender calf on whose neck had been laid the heavy yoke which only the lordly monarch of the herd could carry. He therefore besought his brother to relieve him of the great trust and enter upon his rightful heritage - Rama agreed gladly, and grand preparations for his coronation began forthwith.

Then, on an auspicious day, amid the sonorous chant of *vedic* hymns the triumphant peal of musical instruments and the joyous shouts of a happy people, RAMA SAT WITH SITA ON THE GEM-SET THRONE OF HIS ANCESTORS AND WAS CROWNED KING OF KOSALA. The ceremony of purification by holy water was first done by eight famous sages, with the great Vasishtha at their head, and then by other learned Brahmins - chosen virgins, ministers warriors and citizens.

Vasishta then placed the ancient, dazzling crown on Rama's head, while other sages adorned his person with priceless jewels. Satrugghna held aloft the royal umbrella, while Sugriva and Vibhishana waved the *Chamara* on either side. It is noteworthy that while the Aryan poet Valmiki thus makes the two non-Aryan monarchs play a subordinate part in the coronation of Rama, and gives them no place whatever in the honourable preliminary ceremony of purification, the Dravidian poet, Kamban, describes Sugriva, Hanuman, Vibhishana and the rest as taking part in the purification, and assigns the waving of the *Chamara* to Lakshmana and Satrugghna, making Bharata hold the umbrella. Rama wished to crown the brave and faithful Lakshmana as *yuvaraja*, but that hero firmly declined the high office, and so Bharata was appointed instead. Rama then presented many precious jewels and other tokens of his gratitude and regard to his Vanara friends and Vibhishana, and with his permission, Sita presented to Hanuman a priceless garland of pearls from her own neck. Gifts innumerable and invaluable were also made to holy Brahmans and other worthy persons on the joyous occasion. Rama's friends and guests then took kind leave of him and returned to their own lands, and Rama reigned happily for many years thereafter. Rama was beloved

by his subjects and in the discharge of his high office, he seems to have placed the good will and approval of the people above everything else. So prosperous and happy indeed was his long reign that its memory has been handed down to this day in the phrase *Rama Rajyam*, and Hindus ever look back upon it as the 'Golden Age' of their beloved country, when a righteous and glorious monarch ruled them according to their own will.



LI. The Passing of Sita.

Some say that the *Ramayana* of Valmiki ends with the crowning of Rama, and that the last section, *Uttarakanda*, is by some other poet and not quite authentic. Kamban rendered into immortal Tamil verse only the first six books, but the last is generally regarded as part of the epic, and is indeed a necessary supplement to the whole story. I shall therefore briefly record hereafter the more pertinent incidents narrated in it, omitting everything that relates to Ravana and his race.

After an year or two of great happiness in the lap of luxury and regal power, the love of Rama and Sita for each other was about to bear fruit, when, asked by her dear husband to name anything she desired particularly, Sita expressed a wish to spend a day again in a hermitage in the jungle. It so happened, that, soon after this, Rama asked his ministers one day what was said of him and his reign by his people among themselves, and some of them told him the bitter truth,—that he was praised on all sides for his heroism and righteousness, but that many regretted that such a good King should have taken back into his house the wife who had remained a whole year in another man's

power This set Rama thinking, and he soon began to fear that, in taking back Sita, he had failed in his duty as King and set his people a bad example. A great poet truly says

*"I hold that man the worst of public foes
Who either for his own or children's sake,
To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife
Whom he knows false, abide and rule the house,
Worst of the worst were that man he who reigns!"*

But Rama must have believed in Sita's innocence, and, unlike his subjects at Ayodhya, he had witnessed her ordeal by fire. He seems to have thought that, as appearances count more with the world than the real truth, it was his duty as a King to put away Sita for the sake of the public weal. Perhaps his own doubts revived again; and once the seed of jealousy is sown, it is marvellous how the foul weed grows apace. Tradition says that Rama suddenly surprised Sita one day painting a portrait of Ravana, which she tried to hide on seeing him, and that he was not satisfied with her true explanation,—that it was for the queen-mothers who had asked her about the Rakshasa hero. There is another tradition that Rama himself overheard a washerman one day driving away his wanton wife and saying that he was not Rama to take back such a woman. Somehow, Rama came to think that his honour and duty as a King alike required him to put away his

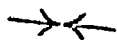
loving and innocent wife, who had already paid so dearly for the great love she bore him. She had wished to spend a day in an *asrama*, and he bade Lakshmana to take her in a chariot to the hermitage of Valmiki, and then leave her there, telling her that her lord wanted her no more. Not even her delicate state then saved the luckless Sita, and she was taken to the forest and cruelly abandoned in Valmiki's *asrama*, at the bidding of her husband.

I have no heart to paint the anguish of the unsuspecting princess on learning her fate, or her misery and suffering in the forest. In due course of time, she gave birth to twins, two fair boys, named and brought up by Valmiki as *Kusa* and *Lava*. The sage, it is said, composed the *Ramayana* and taught the boys to recite it. During a great horse-sacrifice performed by Rama, the boys attended his court and recited the poem before him, to the wonder and delight of all who heard them. They were duly recognised, and Rama learnt the facts from the lips of Valmiki. Struck with remorse and pity, and burning with his old and undying love, Rama again sent for Sita. The patience of a good and loving woman is indeed great, and the saintly Sita again appeared before her royal husband, escorted by the venerable sage who had cherished her like a father for so many years. Sorrow and suffering, such as fall to the lot of few

women even in this vale of misery and tears, had indeed wasted her form and features, but the beauty of innocence and the sweetness of goodness lit up her sad face as she slowly stepped behind the Rishi and stood before her lord who sat in the midst of his courtiers and people. Was he convinced of her purity now at least, and will he accept her for evermore as his true and loving wife ?

Fancy to yourself the brave and beautiful princess, daughter to one king and wedded to another, standing with bent head in the midst of that vast assembly of sages, ministers and citizens, her two lovely sons, the very picture of Rama in his youth, supporting her on either side, and her royal husband sitting sad and thoughtful on the throne of his ancestors, with doubt and duty, pity and passion, remorse and love, wildly struggling for sway within his bosom ! What misery had she not suffered and what indignity and insult had she not borne for her dear love's sake ! And how long, O God, how long ! How wildly and woefully her fond heart fluttered with hope and fear, with wrath and love, in that supreme moment, when her fate seemed to hang for ever on almost the first words that would be uttered by those quivering lips, and how that moment seemed like eternity itself ! The venerable poet-sage had pleaded passionately in her behalf, and there

she stood with her two sons, awaiting her doom. Then, all too slowly and sadly as it seemed, Rama spake at last. "I am satisfied," said he, "but, will not, Janaki give some proof of her purity before this assembly?" O man of doubt and duty! Are your people still unconvinced, and do you require yet another proof? Yes, you shall have it, and such proof too as shall put an end to her misery for evermore on this earth. Pining with mortal thirst, the tender fawn comes panting for very life to the brink of the sparkling stream, and lo, it is all burning sand and scorching air, no more! On hearing her husband's cruel words, her woman's heart burst within her. Laying a hand on her heaving bosom, Sita called upon mother Earth to bear witness to her innocence and she fell down dead where she stood, and passed away to where the suffering and weary are at rest.



LII. The End

BROKEN down by bereavement and haunted by the memory of the grave injustice which had brought it about, Rama, during the remaining years of his reign, must have been immeasurably sad and lonely. But he swerved not a whit from the path of his kingly duty and his ideal of truth, and ere the sun of his life set for ever on this earth, it cast yet another glo-

rious rainbow, more splendid and wonderful indeed than any that had gone before it, and the back-ground was as usual his bitter tears and a cloud that over-shadowed the evening of his life and hastened the deepening gloom. We are told that Kala, from the land of the Devas, sought a secret interview with Rama, and first stipulated that whoever interrupted them should be put to death. Rama agreed, and setting Lakshmana to guard the chamber and warning him of the fatal consequence of any interruption, he retired with Kala. Just then came the dreaded and irritable sage Durvasa, of whom I have told you before, also wishing to see Rama. Lakshmana's expostulations and entreaties were in vain, and the sage threatened to curse Rama, Lakshmana, Kosala, and the whole solar race forthwith, if Rama was not informed of his arrival at once. What was Lakshmana to do? He nobly chose to give up his life rather than subject his beloved brother and all his race and kingdom to the sage's curse, so he deliberately went to Rama, disturbing the interview, and informed him of the sage's coming.

After Kala and Durvasa had left, Lakshmana himself went to his royal brother and reminded him that his own life was forfeited by Rama's promise to Kala. Here was a dilemma indeed, and Rama's distress and grief knew no bounds. He loved Lakshmana more than Sita, or his

own life, and since their birth, they had never been separated even for a day. He had now to sacrifice such a brother in cold blood at the altar of Truth. He placed the facts before his council, and not a sage or minister wavered for a moment the promise to Kala was sacred and inviolable, and truth required the death of Lakshmana, but, said they, renunciation and death are the same, and it would suffice if Rama renounced his brother, Lakshmana thereupon bade his brother a last farewell, and went into the woods, where he performed *tapas* and gladly gave up his life when the call came to him.

Overwhelmed with sorrow, Rama wished to instal Bharata on the throne and retire into the forest to die, but Bharata did not agree to it, nor Satrughna. So Rama left the Kingdom to his sons, Kusa and Lava, who are said to have reigned at Kusavati and Sravasti, the capital of Oudh at the time of Gautama Buddha. Bharata's sons, Taksha and Pushkala, founded the kingdoms of Taksha-sila and Pushkalavati on either side of the Indus, known later to Alexander the Great as Taxila and Peukelaotis; Lakshmana's sons, Angada and Chandraketu, founded the kingdoms of Karupada, and Chandrakanti in Malwa, and Satrughna's sons, Subahu and Satrughati, ruled over Mathura and Vidisa respectively. On abdicating the throne, Rama retired with his two remaining brothers

into the forest beyond Sarayu They spent the rest of their days there in penance and prayer, till in the fulness of time the call came to them too and they passed away to

"Where beyond these voices, there is peace!"



